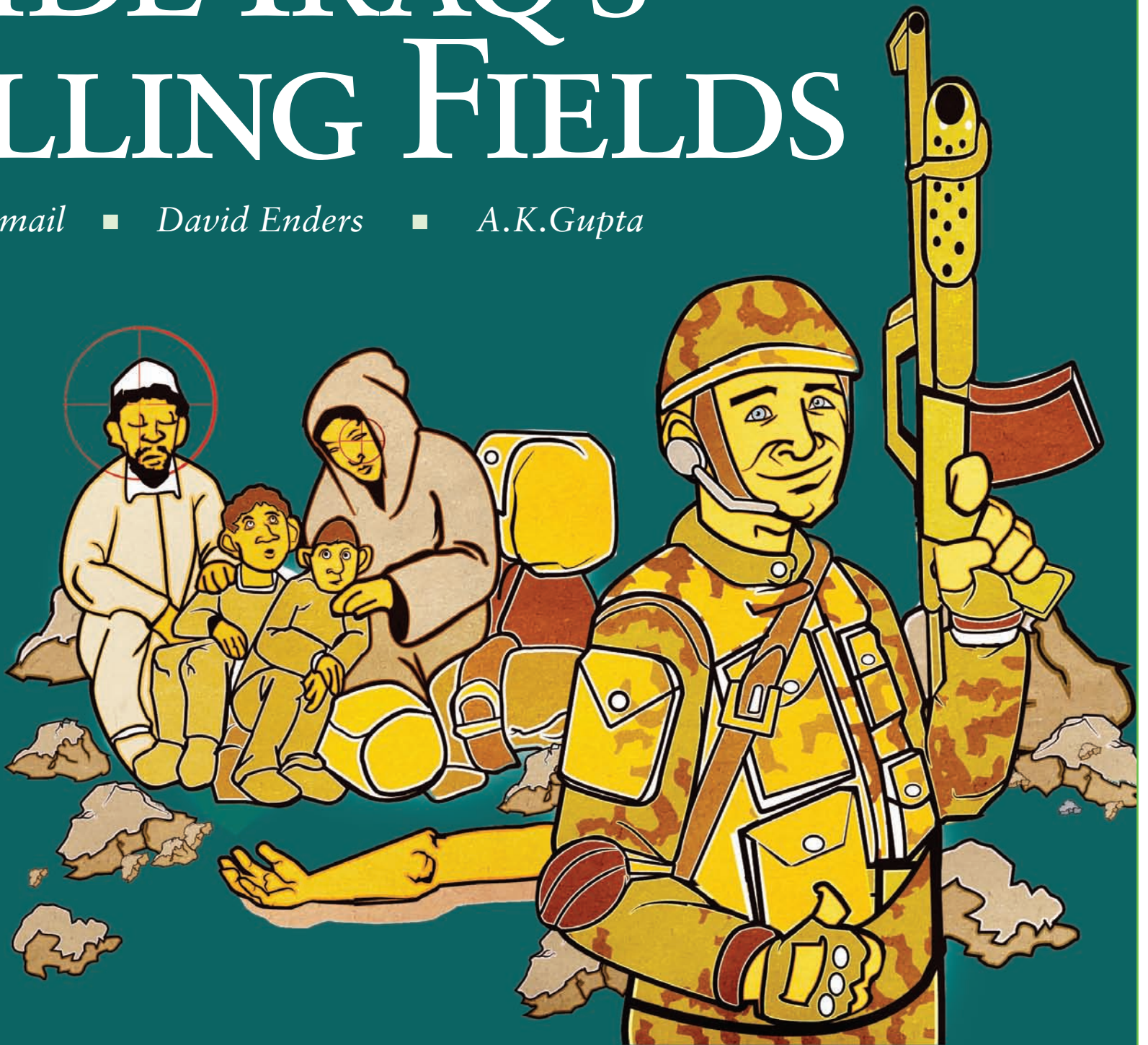


# THE INDYPENDENT

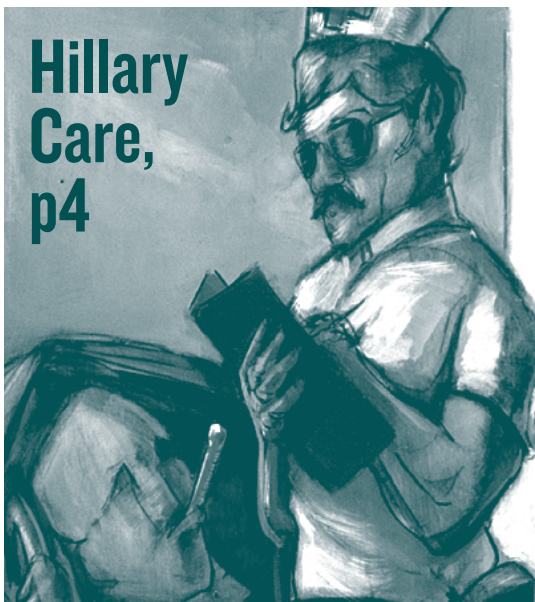
ISSUE #110, OCTOBER 5 - 25, 2007  
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

## INSIDE IRAQ'S KILLING FIELDS

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#### WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center (IMC) is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

*The Independent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

#### WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the editorial process.

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## community calendar

Please send event announcements to [indyevents@gmail.com](mailto:indyevents@gmail.com).

The next editorial meeting for *The Independent* is Tuesday, Oct. 9, 7 pm, at 4 West 43rd St, Suite 311. All are welcome.

#### WED OCT 10

7:30am • Free  
ACTION: "SAY NO! TO MILITARY RECRUITERS TARGETING OUR YOUTH!" Distribute info on alternatives to the military & how to "opt out" of releasing your personal info to recruiters. Sponsored by Brooklyn For Peace. New Utrecht High School, 1601 80th St., Bklyn • [Brooklynpeace.org](http://Brooklynpeace.org) • [nowar@brooklynpeace.org](mailto:nowar@brooklynpeace.org)

#### THU OCT 11

7pm • \$15-\$35 Sliding Scale  
FILM/BENEFIT: PAPER TIGER TV 25TH ANNIVERSARY with Amy Goodman, Bill Tabb and Joan Braderman. Opening reception, video installation, live performance and the premiere of the documentary, *Paper Tiger Reads Paper Tiger Television*. Anthology Film Archives, 322nd Ave 212-420-9045 • [papertiger.org](http://papertiger.org)

#### FRI OCT 12

10am-5pm • Free  
WORKSHOP: "THE ECONOMICS OF GLOBAL WARMING." Economic analysis of the magnitude & distribution of the real & perceived costs of correcting the global-warming externality. The New School for Social Research, Wolff Conference Room, 65 Fifth Ave. RSVP: 212-229-5901 x4911 [cepa@newschool.edu](mailto:cepa@newschool.edu) [newschool.edu/cepa](http://newschool.edu/cepa)

7pm • Donation  
TALK/FILM/MUSIC: "CELEBRATE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE DAY" Carlos Mauricio, torture survivor will lead discussion on anti-torture lawsuit and the Stop Impunity Project, a campaign to persuade South American countries to withdraw from School of Americas. Film: *The Panama Deception*. Revolutionary singer: Jorge Renderos. All Souls Church, Reidy Friendship Hall, 1157 Lexington Ave (at 80th St.) 201-207-1493 • [nycsoaw.org](http://nycsoaw.org)

8pm • \$10 adults/\$6 children  
MUSIC: GOOD COFFEEHOUSE MUSIC PARLOR with singer/songwriters James

O'Malley and Rich Deans.  
53 Prospect Park West • 718-768-2972  
[info@jamesreams.com](mailto:info@jamesreams.com) • [bsec.org/events/coffeehouse/index.html](http://bsec.org/events/coffeehouse/index.html)

#### SAT OCT 13

ALL-DAY CONFERENCE: "BUILDING BRIDGES – HOW AFRICAN AMERICANS & IMMIGRANTS CAN CREATE SOCIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE TOGETHER," sponsored by African Services Cmt-Barnard, Ctr for Law & Social Justice-Medgar Evers College, NAACP, Rockland County Immigration Coalition & others. Barnard College, 3009 Broadway • RSVP: 212-627-2227 x229 • [alee@thenyic.org](mailto:alee@thenyic.org)

11am-5pm • Free  
EVENT: BAY RIDGE PEACE FAIR with anti-war speakers, music and performances. Sponsored by Bay Ridge Neighbors for Peace. • Bay Ridge United Methodist Church, 7002 4th Ave (at 70th St) Bklyn (R to Bay Ridge Ave). • 718-238-4517 646-546-6642 [mmcfadyen@aol.com](mailto:mmcfadyen@aol.com) • [bayridgepeace@yahoo.com](mailto:bayridgepeace@yahoo.com)

3pm  
PLAY/FILM: *VOICES AGAINST THE WAR* by Paul Robeson High School, based on the wartime accounts of members of Black Veterans for Social Justice. Short film by Global Action youth about recruiters targeting undocumented migrants. Discussion follows play/film. Church of the Evangel, 1950 Bedford Ave (at Hawthorn St) Bklyn • 718-287-1189.

#### THU OCT 18-SUN OCT 21

ACTIONS: "TEAR DOWN THE WORLD BANK & INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND." Raise up resistance during the annual WB/IMF meeting. At locations to be announced in D.C. [octoberrebellion.org](http://octoberrebellion.org)

#### FRI OCT 19

ALL-DAY ACTIONS: IRAQ MORATORIUM – BREAK WITH YOUR DAILY ROUTINE AND DEMAND AN END TO THE IRAQ WAR. Different groups & individuals choose their own actions. Wear black ribbons & armbands in mourning for those who

## OCTOBER



CHRIS ANDERSON

#### SATURDAY OCT 13

1-5pm • \$5-\$20 Sliding Scale  
DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A CITIZEN JOURNALIST?  
*The Independent* is hosting a four-hour basic journalism and introduction to Indymedia workshop. Limited space available so apply today!  
Email [indyreporting@gmail.com](mailto:indyreporting@gmail.com) for more information.

have died in this senseless war. [iraqmoratorium.org](http://iraqmoratorium.org)

#### SAT OCT 20 & SUN OCT 21

1-6pm • Free  
A.G.A.S.T.: ANNUAL GOWANUS ARTISTS STUDIO TOUR. A self-guided tour of 140 artist studios along the Gowanus Canal. Maps can be picked up at a few studios along the route or downloaded from the organization's website. [info@agastbrooklyn.com](mailto:info@agastbrooklyn.com) • [agastbrooklyn.com](http://agastbrooklyn.com)

#### SUN OCT 21

5pm • Free  
MEETING: NYC ENCUESTRO FOR DIGNITY & AGAINST GENTRIFICATION for members and families of organizations fighting against gentrification. An eve-

ning of sharing, food & conversation to learn from one another's efforts. Dinner, childcare, Sp/Eng translation. RSVP Location TBA • 212-561-0555 • [movementforjusticeinelbarrio@yahoo.com](mailto:movementforjusticeinelbarrio@yahoo.com)

#### SUN OCT 28

12-4pm • Bring offerings for the altar  
WORKSHOPS: DAY OF THE DEAD CELEBRATION. Join artists in creating paper decorations, sugar skulls and skeletons in celebration of the dead and the living. American Indian Community House, 11 Broadway, 2nd Fl • 212-431-1666 212-598-0100

Next Issue: October 26.

## reader comments

#### I INVENTED "ECO-TERRORISM"

Responses to "*The Birth of a Buzzword: Eco-Terrorism*," Sept. 17.

I coined the term "eco-terrorism" in a 1982 *Reason* magazine article. Bryan Denson borrowed it late in the game after many other uses. I want the credit and you want to get it right. When you write about me, contact me. It's a common journalistic courtesy, I answer most questions and I don't bite. My 1997 book, *EcoTerror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature*, was voted into the Random House Reader Survey of the 100 Most Important Books of the 20th Century. Please let your readers know about the REAL birth of the buzzword.

—RON ARNOLD, EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CENTER FOR THE DEFENSE OF FREE ENTERPRISE

#### GOOD GREENS GET A BAD NAME

Responses to "*Enemy of the State: The Story of Daniel McGowan*," Sept. 17

The ELF is an "eco-terrorist" organization and gives respectable, mainstream environmental groups a bad name. These folks are doing much more harm than good. Why would anyone glorify them?

—SD

I don't see how this is glorifying anyone. Also, I'm not sure if you got this, but many people in this particular case were charged with actions that took place six-plus years ago. This article is showing how one person got involved and why/how he is not involved anymore. Calling the ELF a "terrorist" organization is extremely troubling given the associations with that word and what that means to most people, especially in NYC. The thing with mainstream "respectable" environmental groups is that they are barely able to make any sort of headway with(in) this government. What we all need to figure out is what can we do to improve our world that actually gets somewhere, without having to reach the level of desperation that these people have in the past. I don't



think the ELF was able to reach their goals of making a (positive) difference, although I can't remember the last time I saw any group achieve that.

—SAM J

Continued on page 19



# JENA IGNITES A MOVEMENT

By JORDAN FLAHERTY

Jena, Louisiana — Six courageous families in this small town sent out a call for justice that has now been amplified around the world.

At 5:00 a.m. on Sept. 20, the buses were already arriving. A full bus from Chicago emptied out, some people brushing their teeth as they stepped into the slightly cold predawn air. They seemed exhausted, but also charged and energized. Next came buses from Baton Rouge, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. By 7:00 a.m., reports were coming in that hundreds of buses were lined up outside of town, some having been briefly prevented by Louisiana state police from entering. Meanwhile, hundreds of people, from cars, buses and motorcycles, were pouring into Jena, while many thousands more were gathering in the streets outside the Jena courthouse. As simultaneous rallies began in the two locations, thousands more streamed into the city. By 9:00 a.m., there were, by some estimates, up to 50,000 people in this town of 2,500. Almost every business in town was shut down, many roads were closed by police checkpoints and a sea of protest filled the city for miles.

This demonstration was not initiated by any one national organization, and there was little coordination among some of the major organizations involved.

This decentralization was beautiful, although sometimes chaotic. As thousands gathered at the NAACP-sponsored rally at the town ballfield, thousands more demonstrators marched from the courthouse to the Jena High School, and tens of thousands continued to arrive and fill the streets around downtown Jena. People seemed unconcerned about the lack of clarity, however, and marched on their own schedule, which gave the day a more democratic feel,



**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH:** Lucero James of New York marches in the Jena 6 protest on Sept. 20. The demonstration, which drew tens of thousands of people, was the largest civil rights protest in several decades. PHOTO: ARABY SMITH

unlike the more controlled and sometimes disempowering marches that some mainstream groups have organized in the past.

Participants ranged from children and teens at their first demonstration to civil rights movement veterans. Many people who had never before been to a demonstration ended up organizing a delegation or booking a bus for this journey.

While the vast majority of the white community of Jena chose to stay either indoors or out of town, hundreds of Black Jena residents proudly displayed their “Free The Jena Six” shirts and continued to gather in the ballfield hours after most out-of-town visitors had left. White activists from across the United States also largely stayed away from this historic event — perhaps one to three percent of the crowd was white. This

silence indicates that the U.S. left is divided by race in many of the same ways this country is.

The Sept. 20 march, however, was not about division. It was a generational moment — the kind of watershed event that could signal a turning point. But what does the gigantic crowd in Jena mean? For some supporters, it felt like a deliverance from those months that the families stood alone — a moment where the world stood with them and the power structure backed down. It was also a moment for grass-roots independent media, who built this story and kept it alive until the 24-hour news channels could no longer ignore it. It was a moment for historically Black colleges and universities to shine. Student activists organized bus convoys — five or more buses arrived

from many Southern schools — that were quickly filled by a broad range of students.

The Jena rally was a moment for the unaffiliated left, for people everywhere concerned about a criminal justice system that has locked up two million people and keeps growing. It was a moment for those concerned about school systems in the United States, and especially the policing of our schools, what activists have called the “school-to-prison pipeline.” It was a moment for those who feel that the United States has still not dealt with our history of slavery and Jim Crow and our present realities of white supremacy. Perhaps that is where the power in the Jena Six demonstration lies; if this unfocused and uncontrolled anger can be directed towards real societal change, if outrages like Jena can finally bring about the conversation on race in this country that we were promised after Katrina, if this movement to support these six kids can show that we can unite for justice and win, then Jena will truly have been a victory.

If this happens, we can say that it all began with six families in Jena, Louisiana, who refused to stay silent.

*Jordan Flaherty is an editor of Left Turn Magazine (leftturn.org). His May 9 article from Jena was one of the first to bring the case to a national audience.*

## How the Jena 6 Case Started

The Jena Six controversy began in August 2006 when two Black students stood under the “white tree” during lunch break at Jena High School. The tree and its shade had long been the preserve of white students, and the following day three nooses were found hanging from the tree. The predominantly white school board considered the nooses a prank and handed down brief suspensions.

Months of racial tensions followed, including several altercations between Black and white students. On Dec. 4, a white student was knocked unconscious in a school fight. He was released from the hospital within hours and attended a school function later that night. Second-degree attempted murder charges were subsequently filed against five Black youths for the fight, while a sixth was charged in juvenile court.

Seventeen-year-old Mychal Bell, the first of the six youths to go on trial, faced as much as 22 years in prison after being convicted June 28 of aggravated battery and conspiracy by an all-white jury. As the story of the Jena Six began to spread (especially on Black blogs and talk radio), national pressure on the town began to grow. By early September, attempted murder charges against three of the youths were reduced to aggravated battery and Bell’s conviction was overturned by a state appeals court. Following the Sept. 20 protest, charges against Bell were re-filed in juvenile court and he was released on \$45,000 bond.

And the “white tree?” It was cut down over the summer by town officials looking to put the incident behind them.

—JT

## New Yorkers Got Jena’s Back

By JOHN TARLETON

When tens of thousands of people converged on Jena, Louisiana, on Sept. 20, they were joined by 36 New York-area residents who had boarded a bus in Harlem the previous morning. Sponsored by the Harlem Revolution Club, the bus carried a mix of seasoned activists and first-time protesters, all of whom had been galvanized by the case of the Jena Six. After returning, several of these modern-day freedom riders spoke with *The Independent* about why they went and what they learned. PHOTOS BY SAMANTHA LEWIS

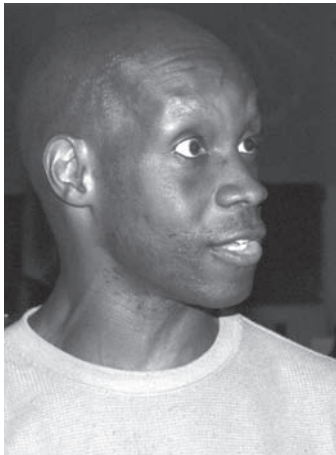
**AESHA BOATWRIGHT, East Harlem**

When I heard about the march, I felt I had to be there ... It was overwhelming. There were people living in shacks that didn’t appear to have plumbing or electricity. When we came through chanting, “Jena 6, New York’s got your back,” they were cheering and saying “right on” and taking our pictures. It was a moment you felt you were there. I felt like I was changing the history of my people.



**ALI MCCOY, Bronx**

[The Jena protest] lit a fire under me. It was a life-changing experience. I can’t play the innocent lamb role any more. Once you know, you gotta act. We have to step up our game. Someone is punching us in the face, and we gotta hit back. Why are we letting people get away with this?



**BARRY CARR, Bronx**

We’re still in the civil rights movement. We haven’t advanced as far as the history books tell us. ... [The local Jena officials] think as soon as we’re gone, they can go back to business as usual. Wrong. We need to make this a Louisiana issue. And if that doesn’t happen, then the federal government needs to come down on Jena from the highest levels.



**WILLIAM REESE, Harlem**

This might be a new moment of people daring to dream. I do think this was something special. There was a deep anger and also a deep joy in resisting and not accepting these degradations and threats. It seems like millions of people have said, “This is where the line is drawn, this is where we say, no more.”







BY ERIN THOMPSON

If you are one of the 47 million Americans who cannot afford the on-average \$4,000 to \$11,000 in annual premiums for individual or family health insurance — or do not have the option of purchasing employer-based health insurance at all, don't worry. "Universal health care" may be just around the corner. Under plans put forward by the leading Democratic presidential candidates, the solution is simple: make it illegal for Americans not to have health insurance.

"The approach of making people buy coverage, but not actually changing the health care system to make it affordable, doesn't work. It leaves the health-care insurance companies in the middle of the health care system, continuing to waste billions of dollars," said David Himmelstein, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and cofounder of Physicians for a National Health Program. "Criminalizing

# Hillary's Rx: Criminalize the Uninsured

the uninsured is not really a reasonable approach to solving the health care issue."

On Sept. 17, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton released her much-anticipated plan for "universal health care." Her plan, which will cost an estimated \$110 billion annually, promises to rein in insurance companies by forcing them to accept all applicants who can pay premiums. However, the plan also emphasizes "personal responsibility" by requiring that all individuals purchase health insurance if they can afford it. Those who cannot afford to pay will be given government subsidies toward the purchase of private health insurance.

Clinton's plan is nearly identical to presidential hopeful John Edwards' plan — so much that Elizabeth Edwards accused Clinton of stealing her husband's ideas — while Barack Obama has proposed a plan that requires employers to contribute toward health coverage for their workers and mandates that all children have insurance.

However, in order for these plans to work, the government has to "have the teeth to essentially punish the uninsured," said Benjamin Day, the executive director of Mass-Care, a single-payer advocacy group in Massachusetts.

In Massachusetts, a similar individual mandate passed in April 2006 has already run into problems. Massachusetts residents were required to purchase health insurance by July 2007 or face an initial \$1,000 fine. In subsequent years, the fine could be as much as half the cost of paying health insurance premiums. Under employer-based plans, a year's worth of coverage in Massachusetts costs an average of \$4,200 for an individual and \$11,400 for a family of four. "There's a bigger penalty for being uninsured than there is for beating your wife or driving drunk," said Himmelstein.

Many Massachusetts residents ignored the July 1, 2007 deadline to purchase health insurance, which forced the state to push the requirement back until the end of the year. "When the end of the year comes about, there's going to be 200,000 to 300,000 people who should be fined for being uninsured," said Day. "Are they going to fine all those people?"

Day and Himmelstein both say they see the Massachusetts law as a failure and are advocates of a single-payer system, which would pool tax dollars into a health care program similar to Medicare, without relying on private insurers.

Himmelstein calls a single-payer system "the only system that will actually work." Physicians for a National Health Program has estimated that a single-payer system would save at least \$300 billion dollars a year in health care costs — which will soar to \$2.2

trillion in 2007. "A single-payer system could save an enormous amount and also could simplify a lot of the system," said Himmelstein.

"The evidence is just so overwhelming. There's not even an academic debate that single-payer is the best way to go, no evidence that there's any other way to go," said Day. Despite this, only one of the Democratic candidates, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, (D-Ohio), is calling for a single-payer health care system.

"The only thing you hear is that single-payer is not politically feasible; that's just a lack of leadership," said Day. "Imagine if people had told us that during the women's suffrage movement, or civil rights, that it wasn't politically feasible and if they said, 'Okay, let's fight for something less.' We just need to find actual leaders who are willing to fight for that right, instead of censoring themselves in advance."

## Single Payer Explained

The only industrialized nation in the world that does not guarantee access to health care for all its citizens, the United States is also only one of two industrialized countries that does not utilize a single-payer health care system. Often mischaracterized as "socialized medicine," a single-payer health care system would utilize a single, government-run fund to pay for health care. It would eliminate insurance companies, co-payments and premiums and cover the costs of health care for all Americans, while retaining privately administered care from doctors, hospitals and health care providers.

Physicians for a National Health Program, a single-payer advocacy group, estimates that a single-payer universal health care system could save \$300 billion annually by reduc-

ing administrative costs. Presidential hopeful Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) is the only Democratic candidate with a proposed plan for a universal, single-payer, not-for-profit health care system. Healthcare Now!, a national coalition of groups calling for health-care reform, is pushing for the passage of H.R. 676, a bill co-introduced in February 2005 by Kucinich and Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.). Called the "Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act," H.R. 676 proposes a single-payer, universal health-care system similar to Medicare and currently has 78 co-sponsors.

For more info:  
*Healthcare Now!* [healthcare-now.org](http://healthcare-now.org)  
*Physicians for a National Health Program*  
[pnhp.org](http://pnhp.org)

# Bronx Student Finds Free Med School in Cuba

BY VIRGINIA LORA

When aspiring doctor and Bronx native Tachira Tavarez graduated from Amherst College in May 2007, she was faced with a reality check: She could not afford the tuition required for medical school. Determined to become a doctor, Tavarez planned on postponing her graduate education in order to work and save for medical school. "I was going to teach for a couple of years," said Tavarez. "I thought that if at the time I couldn't afford to help my community through medicine, then I would be able to do it through education."

For many college students surveying the possibility of med school, the problem is a common one. According to the American Medical Association, the average tuition and fees in 2002 at public and private U.S. medical schools were \$14,577 and \$30,960 respectively. And that is, of course, not counting other expenses, such as room, board and textbooks.

Luckily, Tavarez has found — and eagerly seized — an opportunity to study medicine on a full scholarship this fall. Along with 18 other U.S. students, Tavarez is attending the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Havana, Cuba.

ELAM offers a six-year medical school program open to qualified students from the neediest communities in Latin America and

Africa. In September 2000, this opportunity was extended to U.S. students from low-income communities or communities of color who would not otherwise be able to afford medical school. Students who enter the program receive a full scholarship from the Cuban government, which covers tuition, room and board, textbooks and a small stipend for personal expenses.

Like all other students in the program, U.S. participants must have a deep-seated commitment to practicing medicine in medically underserved communities after graduating from the program. The idea of a medical school directed at people who want to help under-served populations immediately sparked Tavarez's interest.

"Coming from a lower-working-class background, my goal was to always serve the community that I came from," said Tavarez, who while at Amherst went back to the Bronx every summer to work as an intern or a volunteer in the community.

Prior to applying, Tavarez discussed the ELAM and the Cuban health-care system with several doctors, all of whom recommended it. "They said it was one of the best schools to attend because of the quality of education I would be receiving there," she said.

Though ELAM's curriculum closely corresponds to how medicine is taught in the United States in terms of subject matter, the style "emphasizes cooperative rather than competi-



**DOCTOR IN TRAINING:** Bronx native Tachira Tavarez began a free, six-year medical program in Havana, Cuba, in August.

tive learning, smaller class sizes, frequent oral exams and intensive tutoring." The program is also based on intensive advising designed to help every student succeed, and it offers at no additional cost Spanish classes and pre-med courses in Spanish for students who need it.

"Here everything is very competitive and more of a 'sink-or-swim' environment, whereas in the Cuban school, students are encouraged to help each other so that every-

one passes," said Tavarez, echoing the comments of the U.S. ELAM students she has been corresponding with. "It made perfect sense to me. If the world needs more doctors, encourage people to heal each other so that we can have more doctors."

Tavarez left for Havana on Aug. 26, and plans to come back to the United States every summer while studying in Cuba. After graduation, she is planning to apply for residencies in the Bronx.

## The Cuban Model

Cuba has invested heavily in public health care. *The New England Journal of Medicine* reports that Cuba has "twice as many physicians per capita as the United States and health indicators are at par with those in the most developed nations." Despite this, Cuba's publicly run system cost only \$250 per person in 2003, according to the United Nations Human Development Report for 2006. The United States, which currently ranks 39th in the world in health care and counts 47 million people uninsured, will spend \$2.2 trillion, or \$7,500 per person, on its privatized health care system in 2007.

—V.L.



# ANTI-ABORTIONISTS SEE SONOGRAMS AS “Windows to the Womb”

By Eleanor J. Bader

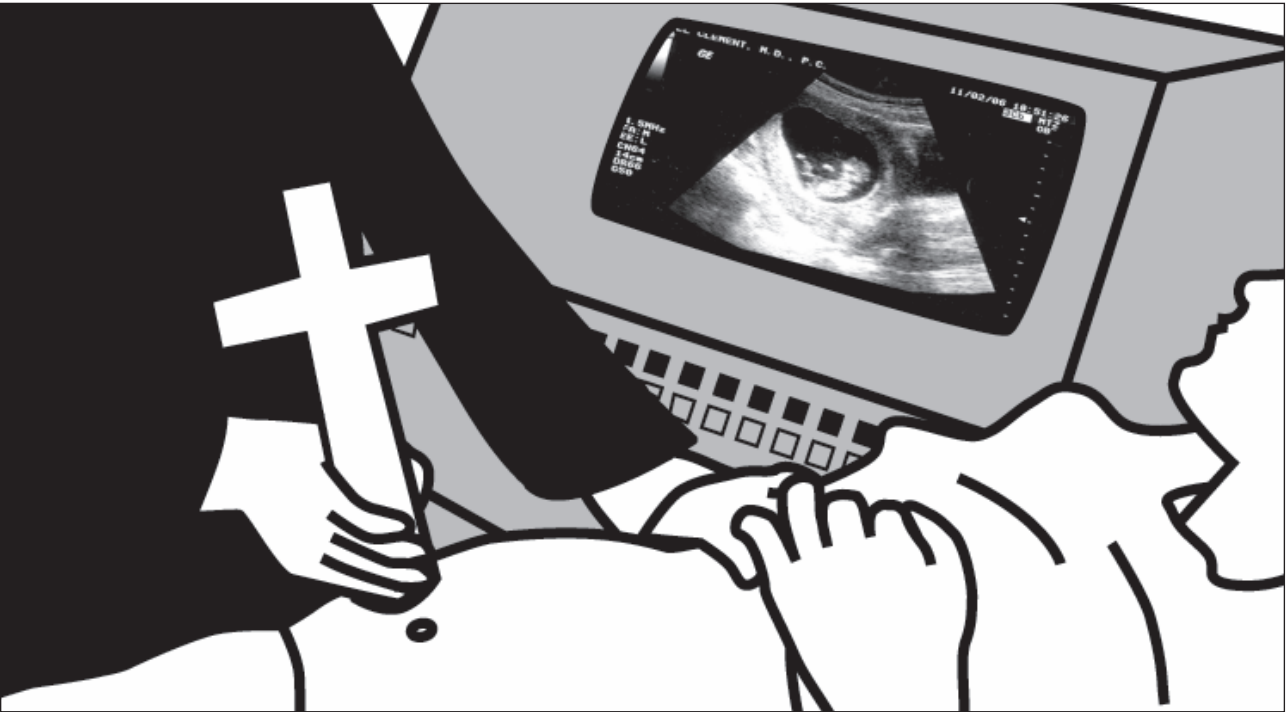
When Republican presidential hopeful Ron Paul, a Texas Congressman, addressed the National Right to Life Committee in June, he told the audience about his friend, former abortion provider Bernard Nathanson. “Nathanson did 65,000 abortions before the ultrasound came out, but when he saw the beating heart, he couldn’t do them anymore,” Paul reported. “If we’re going to end abortion, people have to look at the baby [sic].”

Anti-abortionists agree and have introduced mandatory sonogram legislation in state legislatures across the country. Their intent is to force women to view ultrasound footage before having an abortion. Idaho and Mississippi already impose this requirement and 11 states require abortion providers to apprise patients of their right to see a sonogram if they desire.

Sonograms — high-frequency sound waves that float through the amniotic sac, abdomen and pubic cavity to create an image of the fetus and placenta — are routinely used to confirm fetal age and due date, check embryo growth and development, identify ectopic pregnancies and forecast gender. They are performed by obstetricians, gynecologists and abortion providers five to six weeks after a woman’s last menstrual period. In addition, nearly one quarter of the country’s approximately 3,000 Crisis Pregnancy Centers use them to harangue women into carrying their pregnancies to term.

As those opposed to abortion see it, once a woman views the fetus, she will be unable to end its life. Richard Land, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commissioner of the conservative Southern Baptist Convention, is widely credited for popularizing this idea. “If wombs had windows,” he says, “people would be much more reticent to abort babies because they would be forced to confront the evident humanity of the baby from very early gestation onward. Pregnant mothers who see their babies on sonograms are far more likely to carry their babies to term.”

Not true, say abortion providers. Instead, they see the campaign as little more than guilt-mongering and charge that it infantilizes women because it assumes that they have no understanding of what they are about to do when they enter a clinic. “Look,” says Peg Johnston, director of Southern Tier Women’s Services in Vestal, New York, “women are not always clear about the stages of fetal development, but



SHIRA GOLDING

they always know that if they don’t have an abortion they will have a kid. Of course they know this is about life. Seeing a sonogram may make them feel bad, but they will still have their abortions and then go home and continue their lives.”

Equally insidious, Johnston continues, is the fact that mandatory ultrasounds intrude into the relationship between doctor and patient. “In our field the relationship between the woman and her physician is everything. If providers have to do ultrasounds, they will, but the doctor will be sure to say, ‘The state requires me to show you X, Y and Z.’ They will distance themselves from the requirement to preserve their relationship with the patient.”

Cristina Page, author of *How the Pro-Choice Movement Saved America*, likens the requirement to taunting since virtually all clinics already allow a woman who wishes to see a sonogram to do so. “If seeing an ultrasound before an abortion becomes required, so should telling the woman that an embryo/fetus cannot feel pain before the twentieth week of pregnancy,” she says.

What’s more, Page says that forcing women who are terminating pregnancies due to developmental abnormalities — often not discovered until late in the second trimester — to view fetal images amounts to vindictive cruelty. While she believes that “more information is always a good thing,” she says that forcing ultrasounds on women is unnecessary.

Not surprisingly, the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American Medical Women’s Association oppose forcing women to view the fetus. They argue that the test should be used as a medical tool, not a political sledgehammer.

Nonetheless, they — as well as abortion clinics and their allies — expect numerous fights on this issue during the 2007-2008 legislative session. Once more, two distinct worldviews will face off. Time will tell whether the law will opt to treat women as capable decision makers or, like Ron Paul and Richard Land, will treat them like children in need of protection, mindless souls who know

# Auto Workers Get Shafted

By Bennett Baumer

After a two-day strike, the 73,000 members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) at General Motors (GM) will vote by Oct 10 to ratify a contract that radically changes the future of the auto industry.

UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and GM executives call the contract a landmark agreement and say the it protects union jobs in America and will help GM compete with Japanese carmaker Toyota.

Toyota is in GM’s rearview mirror and is closer than it appears.

Toyota is poised to be the top-selling carmaker in the world (over GM). Its non-union employees do not bargain for contracts and have salaries, health care and other benefits inferior to Detroit’s UAW members. Toyota’s non-union workforce was the 800-pound gorilla at the UAW-GM contract negotiations, as GM seeks to bring UAW members down to the level of Toyota workers.

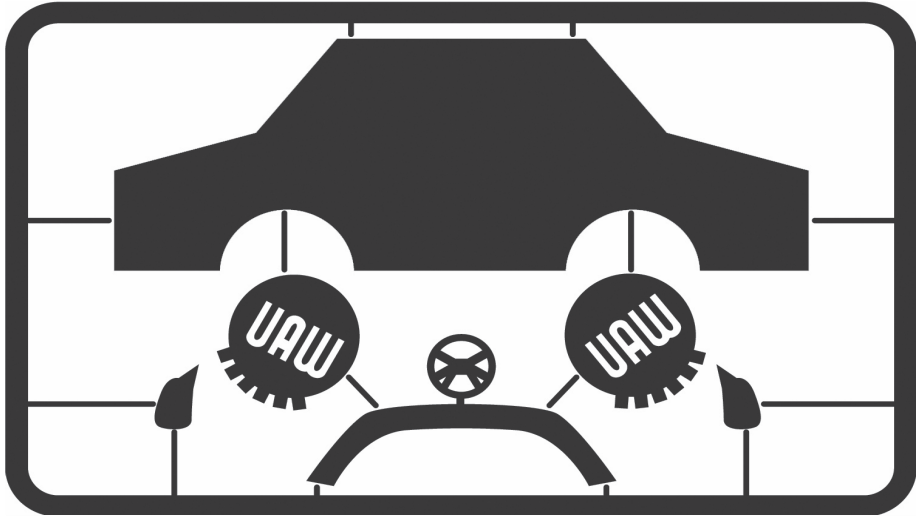
As tens of thousands of GM workers read over the contract’s fine print, they will find that many of the it’s provisions bear the hallmarks of concessionary bargaining. GM accomplished its main goal of off-loading retirees’ health benefits, which would have cost at least \$50 billion dollars, through the creation of a Volunteer Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA).

GM will contribute \$29.9 billion into the union-administered trust, which will pay for retired workers and future retirees’ health benefits. The fund, which will begin working by 2010, will substantially diminish GM’s responsibility for its retirees’ health benefits. The UAW believes that returns on investments made by the trust will keep it solvent for at least 80 years. GM spent \$4.7 billion on health care for its 350,000 retirees in 2006 alone, and health benefits costs are expected to climb.

The question for UAW officials and union members as they vote on the contract is, “Will it play in Peoria?”

UAW members at the Caterpillar plant in Peoria, Illinois voted to create a VEBA trust in 1998 to cover retiree health benefits, but the fund has already run dry. The plant’s 20,000 retirees now must eat most of their medical costs. “God, did we get stuck,” Caterpillar retiree Stan Valentine told the *Peoria Journal Star* on Sept. 27. “Initially the VEBA worked OK, but it just got eaten up by the astronomical rise in medical insurance.”

But the creation of VEBA is not the only GM gain. The union also negotiated a two-tiered wage system that will probably be replicated at Ford and Chrysler. “VEBA is bad, horrendous and was agreed to before they got to the table, but even worse is the two-tier wage system that creates a



JENNIFER LEW

lower class of workers,” former UAW executive board member Warren Davis told *The Independent*.

Current GM assembly line workers earn \$28 dollars per hour, but “non-core” jobs, will make half as much. As veteran workers retire, non-core workers could move into the higher-paying assembly-line jobs, though in future contracts GM may seek to define assembly-line production as non-core work. Management often uses tiered-wage systems to break solidarity between workers.

“Going to vote for this contract is like picking up my tombstone,” said Gregg Shotwell, a worker at GM’s Lansing, Michigan plant and member of Soldiers of

Solidarity, a UAW reform group. “It was a token strike to give workers the notion it was a struggle to get the contract.”

Shotwell started as a UAW member at Delphi’s Coopersville, Michigan plant in 1979, but transferred to GM after Delphi closed the plant down in 2006. The UAW negotiated a concessionary contract this summer with Delphi that lowered wages for all workers and allowed the GM spin-off auto parts manufacturer to shutter factories and buy out workers.

“This is the Delphi contract now at GM,” said Shotwell. “That \$14-per-hour worker will now look at his top-tier coworker and think, ‘What a son of a bitch.’”



# Affordable Housing On The Line

## STATE HOUSING AGENCY TRIES TO CLOSE MITCHELL-LAMA LOOPHOLE

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

In an attempt to curtail rent-gouging by landlords leaving the Mitchell-Lama program, the state’s housing agency has proposed eliminating a loophole in the law — the “unique or peculiar circumstances” provision — that owners have used to escape rent regulations.

New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) wants to change its rules so that landlords cannot claim “unique or peculiar” increases simply because they have taken apartments out of Mitchell-Lama or a similar program. Tenants in Mitchell-Lama buildings built before 1974 are supposed to be protected by rent stabilization if their landlord opts

out of the program. But several owners, most notoriously Laurence Gluck of Stellar Management, have argued that they were entitled to unlimited rent increases because leaving the program constituted “unique or peculiar circumstances.” In 2005, the state’s highest court ruled that the DHCR could grant such increases in most of the affected buildings.

There are now 24 “unique or peculiar” applications pending before the DHCR, including buildings with almost 5,000 apartments. Eleven of them come from Stellar, perhaps the landlord most aggressive at removing buildings from Mitchell-Lama. Another 17,800 apartments still in the program would also be protected if the DHCR adopts the proposed change.

In the DHCR’s hearings on the proposal

Sept. 24 in Manhattan, tenants and activists sounded several common themes. Protecting Mitchell-Lama tenants is a crucial part of ameliorating the city’s housing crisis. These working- and middle-class tenants are the people who keep the city running and sustain community. There is nothing “unique or peculiar” about landlords leaving the program, and they made plenty of money while they were in it. And this proposed change is only a first step: It does not protect tenants in buildings from 1974 on, who are not covered by rent stabilization except in rare circumstances.

“We have stayed in our communities. We have built these communities,” said Darryl Allen, president of the tenants association at Bruckner Towers in the Bronx. “We were not put here to be baby-sitters for this property so in 20 years our rent could be increased and we can be put out.” His rent, \$694 a month, would go up to \$741 under rent stabilization. Stellar is trying to raise it to \$1,250.

The one witness who opposed the proposed change was Mitchell Posilkin, general counsel for the Rent Stabilization Association, a real-estate lobbying group. Dismissing the proposed change as a “political response to tenant activism,” he argued that landlords leaving Mitchell-Lama need large rent increases because the ones allowed under rent stabilization are “inadequate” — they’re not enough to cover the extra taxes landlords incur by leaving the program.

“If they thought it was going to be a hardship, they wouldn’t have left Mitchell-Lama,” responded Sue Susman, a tenant leader at Central Park Gardens on the Upper West

Side. Stellar is trying to raise the rent for a low-income tenant’s one-bedroom apartment from \$496 to \$3,015, she said, and it wants to raise her rent from \$1,000 to \$5,275.

Sandra Rivera, a tenant at Independence Plaza North in Tribeca — a former Mitchell-Lama building not covered by rent stabilization, but where the Bloomberg administration arranged for some tenants to receive federal “enhanced Section 8” subsidies — broke down crying when talking about how Stellar had raised her rent from \$900 to \$5,600 and the city had terminated her Section 8 payments because of an alleged “change of household composition.” A customer-service worker for the city’s child-support agency, she said she makes \$906 every two weeks and takes care of her disabled nephew.

Though the Mitchell-Lama program is usually considered middle-income housing, many tenants, especially the elderly, are closer to near-poor, said Tom Waters, a housing-policy analyst with the Community Service Society. The median income in Mitchell-Lamas in 2005 was only \$22,500 a year.

Several bills to deal with the situation passed the State Assembly this year but went nowhere in the Republican-majority state Senate. The current measure endorsed by many tenants at the hearing is S.5284/A.7811, sponsored by Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assemblymember Gary Pretlow, both Westchester Democrats. It would let the city and suburban counties or towns bar “unique or peculiar” rent increases and extend rent stabilization to all buildings leaving Mitchell-Lama, Section 8, or similar programs, regardless of when they were built.

### The Mitchell-Lama Program: What’s at Stake

The Mitchell-Lama program, begun in 1955, is sometimes called New York State’s most successful affordable-housing program. In it, landlords got tax breaks for constructing housing and keeping it affordable. In the 1960s and 1970s, approximately 140,000 units, roughly half rental and half co-op, were built in the city under the program. These included Co-op City in the Bronx, Starrett City in Brooklyn, and General Sedgwick House in the Bronx — known as the “birthplace of hip-hop” because pioneering DJ Kool Herc spun records at his sister’s birthday party there in 1973. Donald Trump’s father gained much of the family fortune by erecting Mitchell-Lama highrises on the land between Coney Island and Brighton Beach.

- The law that established the program lets landlords buy out of it, usually after 20 years. With the real-estate market growing like a particularly aggressive cancer, many owners have opted to do that so they can raise rents.
- In 1990, there were more than 65,000 Mitchell-Lama rental apartments in the city.
  - As of Dec. 31, 2006, according to Tom Waters of the Community Service Society, there were fewer than 40,000 apartments left, with about 3,700 lost last year.
  - Buyouts are now pending for another 11,000 apartments, including the 5,900-unit Starrett City complex.
  - In April, seven former Mitchell-Lama buildings in Harlem, East Harlem and Roosevelt Island were sold for \$940 million.
  - If landlords buy out of the program, the vast majority of tenants in buildings built in 1974 or afterward have no rights: They can be evicted without cause at the end of their leases and can have their rent doubled, tripled or even septupled.
  - Tenants in buildings from before 1974 are supposed to be protected by rent stabilization — but landlords have been attempting to win similarly astronomical rent increases by claiming “unique or peculiar circumstances.”

—SW



**EMBATTLED TENANT:** Sue Susman gestures outside her Upper West Side apartment. Susman’s landlord is trying to use a loophole in the Mitchell-Lama housing program to raise her rent from \$1,000 to \$5,275. Thousands of other Mitchell-Lama tenants face similar rent increases. PHOTO: SAMANTHA LEWIS

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A community member from Barrio La Revolucion, Guatemala, catches up on *The Independent*.  
PHOTO: JAMES RODRIGUEZ/MIMUNDO.ORG



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# Ineffective in D.C.

BY JESSICA LEE AND JOHN O’HAGAN

More than four years after massive protests preceded the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, a divided antiwar movement finds itself hard-pressed to put large numbers of people in the streets. Roughly 50,000 people turned out for a Sept. 15 antiwar demo in Washington, D.C. sponsored by International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) and scattered, decentralized protests took place across the country during the Sept. 21 “Iraq Moratorium.” On Sept. 29, the Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC) drew a much smaller crowd to the nation’s capital to participate in its march to “Stop the War and Fight Racism at Home.”

TONC’s march, which had more than 1,600 endorsers and about 5,000 participants, followed a small, week-long encampment on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol building that saw protesters pitch tents and set up tables. The reason was simple: put constant pressure on Congress to end the war and address domestic issues. Said Laura Bickford, a member of University of North Carolina Students for a Dem-

ocratic Society (SDS), “New Orleans still isn’t built due to the war. Healthcare is not happening due to the war.” Asked about the intended effect of the encampment, she answered “In terms of media, I do not think they care. This was for Congress’ attention.”

Seeking to further connect the war to domestic issues, Troops Out Now organizers led the march by the Department of Health and Human Resources, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency and the headquarters for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). There, several New Orleans residents spoke about conditions more than two years after Hurricane Katrina. “Let it be known that New Orleans is not where it should be,” said Sharon Johnson, a resident and co-founder of the Common Ground Collective which has worked to help rebuild New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward.

The march returned to the Capitol where more than 75 SDS members sat down in a nearby intersection and vowed to be arrested before they would move. Upon realizing the road was already blocked by the police, they moved their human blockade to the nearby intersection of Constitution



**STILL MARCHING:** Antiwar protesters gather outside the U.S. Capitol on Sept. 29. PHOTO: JESSICA LEE

Boulevard and Pennsylvania Avenue. Traffic was blocked and police officers started re-routing traffic. “This is about civil disobedience. This is about direct action,” said Daniel Foster of North Carolina State University SDS chapter. Just as politicians were not around the Capitol on the week-

end, being late on a Saturday, not much traffic was in the area. The next round of antiwar protests continues on Oct. 27 when United for Peace and Justice convenes regional demonstrations in 11 cities around the country including New York.

## Voices from the Street

INTERVIEWS BY JESSICA LEE AND JOHN O’HAGAN  
PHOTOS BY K. CYR AND JESSICA LEE

*A variety of antiwar protesters spoke with The Independent on Sept. 29 about why they came to Washington and what they planned to do when they returned home.*



“It’s important to protest at the nation’s capital because it has the best chance of making national press, unlike home in Madison, Wisconsin. And this is where the politicians are. When I get back home, I am going to start working with the public access station on antiwar coverage and work with the new SDS chapter that is forming, as well as join the coalition to get our national guard out of the war.”

—MILES KRISTAN, University of Wisconsin photo & film student who has taken a semester off to work with the antiwar movement.



“In New Orleans, we are trying to get the city rebuilt the best we can. I came here so people don’t forget that after two years, we still need help and I want to spread the word to get more volunteers. I support stopping the war because people are losing their lives so young in Iraq, just like people lost their lives in Katrina, without just cause.”

—SHARON JOHNSON, New Orleans resident and co-founder of Common Ground



“As a father who lost his son in Iraq, I am here to honor my son ... to show people a way to grieve and a way to demand peace and justice. I brought my memorial to show grief in public. It is important for people go home to share with others this experience that you can have nowhere else.”

—CARLOS ARREDONDO, father of Lance Corporal Alexander Scott Arredondo, 20, who was shot and killed by an Iraqi sniper in August 2004.



“It’s important to demand an end to war and occupation around the world and to stand with the people in Iraq. In Raleigh, I do counter-recruiting work with SDS. When you cannot afford education, you are forced to join the military with the promise of education.”

—BEN CARROLL, University of North Carolina sophomore and member of SDS and Fight Imperialism Stand Together (FIST)



“I am disgusted on what is going on and there is so much wrong with what’s going on. We need a third party because the Democrats are just the same as Republicans. They are trying to frustrate people from voting. At home in Amherst, Massachusetts, I have started going to meetings with the local ANSWER group.”

—GREG BROWN, Massachusetts resident



“I rode across the country [from Portland, Ore.] for this. I wanted to hear the big range of voices. Everyone had a message for the war. I want to lend our family and our message to this movement. We want to organize using bicycles, not using buses, so we do not get sucked into the war machine. We want to get over our dependence on a resource.”

—MICHELE DARR, Portland, Oregon resident who rode her bike across the country with her husband, 12-year-old daughter, and 2-year-old twins.

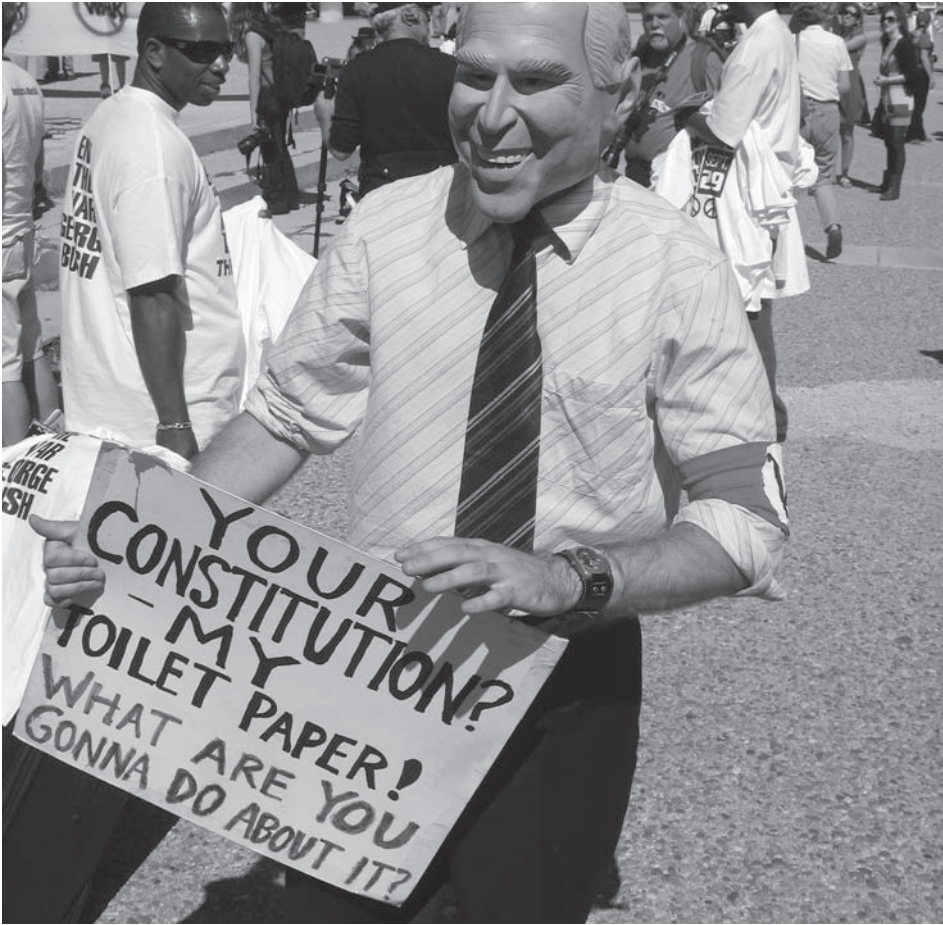


# I'M TIRED OF MARCHING IN CIRCLES

By Sam Dock

On Sept. 29 I went down with a few people to an antiwar demonstration in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC). Though I talked with a lot of people and had a good time, it also clarified a lot of my concerns about the direction of the antiwar movement. The demonstration garnered considerably fewer participants than past marches, with at best 5,000 people in attendance. Yet the conversations I shared with several other activists centered not around the numbers, but more about what we were there to do. Looking around, this question was accentuated by the some of the odd characters around us. A guy who resembled “Comic Book Guy” from *The Simpsons* kept droning on about Hubert Humphrey in ‘76. Another man with a permanent helmet and air traffic controller headset looked like

see and which I put down after reading only a few sentences of another re-tread article. There have been upwards of 20 “major” demonstrations in D.C. and countless other ones around the world, involving millions of people. What have we produced? A million dead in Iraq, years of war and a very real concern that the United States will attack Iran. Speakers on a stage and marching in circles is not working and hasn’t been for some time. It is difficult to live in this time and place, but we have to get past these self-therapeutic rituals of illusory resistance. We say, “No Justice, No Peace,” and nobody asks what that really means. We have had no justice. Does “no peace” really mean shouting loudly on empty Saturday streets? As I looked around the tired faces on the bus coming back, something crystallized.



An antiwar demonstrator with a President Bush mask holds a sign with an ambiguous message at the Washington, D.C., march on Sept. 29. PHOTO: JOHN O’HAGAN

he was evading a group home. There was a talkative fellow with a serious facial rash who was enthusiastic about a possible Sam Nunn presidential bid. And then there was the same Trot guy I always see, young, but getting a little older now, still hawking his papers and arguing his correct line. On the Troops Out Now bus from New York, we were told how important the day was, but the speakers at the rally outside the Capital repeated the same old things while we called out the same old chants and got back the same old responses. Souvenir guys hawked protest t-shirts (dated Sept. 29!) just like at a serious basketball game or Disney World. Other than an extended detour on a lost bus, it was a protest like any other: speeches no one listened to, marching and chanting for two hours and requests for money. On the bus back, a nice, well-intentioned bus captain talked about a new kind of movement. But, she passed out the same weathered copy of some paper that I always

The 30 percent of the country who still likes Bush will like him no matter what: because he’s white, because they’re afraid, because they think bombing Iran will somehow keep everything holding on for that much longer. And these people will never stray. They’re the ones at the pre-screened rallies, thanking him for all he’s doing. They’re politically like Terri Schiavo: there, but not. I’m a lefty and will be until I die. I think we can have a world of justice and freedom and that capitalism and its various sicknesses, man-made as they are, can be unwrought and a better society can be formed. I don’t think there is a liberal solution: we couldn’t reform our way out of the concentration camps and we can’t lobby our way past the death squads. But, looking around the bus, I felt too much of a connection between Bush’s 30 percent, following blindly, and this antiwar moment, performing our anger, but resisting nothing. We owe it to ourselves to create a new strategy. Because this isn’t working.

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## A LEGACY OF RESISTANCE

**1948** Burma gains independence from Great Britain.

**1962** General Ne Win leads a military coup that ends democratic rule.

**1988** Security forces gun down more than 3,000 pro-democracy supporters protesting government repression and economic mismanagement.

**1989** A second military coup d'état led by General Saw Maung occurs and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) is founded and renames the nation "Myanmar."

**1990** The first free elections in almost 30 years are held, however the elections are annulled by the military regime after the National League for Democracy wins with an overwhelming majority.

**1991** Aung San Suu Kyi is, leader of the NLD opposition party, receives the Nobel Peace Prize while under house arrest. She continues to be held prisoner.

**Aug. 2007** The government increases the price of fuel by as much as 500 percent, sparking pro-democracy protests. Military violently represses activists, inspiring Buddhists monks to take action.

**Sept. 5** The military injures three monks while suppressing a peaceful protest in Pakokku, setting off the "Saffron Revolution."

**Sept. 24** On the seventh consecutive day of monk-led demonstrations in the capital of Rangoon, as many as one hundred thousand people parade through the streets.

**Sept. 28** The government shuts down the country's only internet server and is said to be restricting text messages and photographs on cellular phones following days of police attacks on demonstrators.

**Oct. 1** By the end of September, the junta had detained thousands of activists and monks. An unknown number have been tortured and/or murdered.

**Oct. 2** U.N. special envoy Ibrahim Gambari completes a four-day visit in Burma, requesting the junta lift the repression of the peaceful protests and move in the direction of democratic reform and human rights.

**Oct. 3** Mass disappearances are reported as security forces drag supporters of the failed uprising out of their homes in the middle of the night. At dawn, military vehicles patrol

the streets with loudspeakers blaring: "We have photographs. We are going to make arrests!"

Help raise money to send digital cameras to citizen journalists in Burma: [stonecircles.org](http://stonecircles.org)

## A NATION IN CRISIS

By Jessica Lee and John Tarleton

The streets of Rangoon, Burma's largest city, fell eerily quiet in early October as the nation's military junta struck back at Buddhist monks and other pro-democracy activists who joined a nonviolent uprising against the regime only weeks earlier. According to one senior Burmese military intelligence officer described as having defected to neighboring Thailand, the government crackdown is worse than anyone imagined.

"Many more people have been killed in recent days than you've heard about," Hla Win told the (UK) *Daily Mail*. "The bodies can be counted in several thousand."

The 42-year-old chief of military intelligence in Rangoon's northern region added: "I decided to desert when I was ordered to raid two monasteries and force several hundred monks onto trucks. They were to be killed and their bodies dumped deep inside the jungle."

Burma's latest round of unrest (see timeline) began Aug. 19 when the government announced it was hiking fuel prices by as much as 500 percent, an unbearably high burden on an already impoverished nation and a blow to the monks who rely on public charity. Scattered protests broke out across the country but student and pro-democracy demonstrators were quickly scooped up and arrested by the police. Then, unexpectedly, Burma's revered Buddhist monks took up the protest cause and quickly shook the regime to its core.

Beginning Sept. 18, Rangoon saw seven straight days of increasingly larger marches through the center of the city led by thousands of crimson-robed monks who denounced the military regime's leaders as "pitiless soldier kings." Growing protests were also reported in a number of other cities around the country.

On Sept. 26, these soldier kings unleashed their troops, who cordoned off and then invaded many monasteries hauling away monks in military vehicles under the cover of night.

As for the military regime, most observers agree that it will not be easily toppled. Burma has vast natural gas reserves that are much-coveted by neighboring China and India while Chevron is the largest U.S. investor in Burma with its stake in the multi-billion dollar Yadana natural gas pipeline. The generals are also making millions off deforesting the old-growth forests of eastern Burma and selling the timber to China.

The revenues from selling off Burma's natural resources enable the country's military leaders to maintain a 400,000-man army. Besides suppressing urban-based, pro-democracy protests, the junta has fought with the Karen, Shan, Mon and other restive ethnic minorities in eastern and southern Burma. Since 1988, 3,000 villages have been destroyed and 1.5 million people have fled to neighboring countries, according to the U.S. Campaign for Burma.

(Left, top to bottom)

A Buddhist monk holds an upside down alms bowl during a peaceful march in Rangoon Sept. 24, a powerful symbol that the monks refused alms from the military junta. BMC

A murdered monk rots in a pool of water. Reports say that bodies of hundreds of executed monks have been dumped in Burmese jungles. ABCNEWS.COM

The military guards barricades near the Sule Pagoda monastery in Rangoon Sept. 27. 70,000 people violated police orders and marched after monasteries were vandalized and monks kidnapped the night before. U.S. CAMPAIGN FOR BURMA.

(Right, top to bottom)

Hundreds of Burmese refugees demonstrate in New Delhi Sept. 30, urging India to act against the military oppression. SONESEAYAR.BLOGSPOT.COM

Monks peacefully confront military soldiers Sept. 26. Thousands have been arrested or "disappeared." KHINMINZAW.BLOGSPOT.COM

New Yorkers gather in support Oct. 1 outside Burma's U.N. Mission at E. 77th St. and Madison Ave. K. CYR

### online resources

**U.S. Campaign on Burma:**  
[uscampaignforburma.org](http://uscampaignforburma.org)

**Burmese Bloggers Against Borders:**  
[bbwob.blogspot.com](http://bbwob.blogspot.com)

**Ko-htike's Blog:**  
[ko-htike.blogspot.com](http://ko-htike.blogspot.com)

**All Burma I.T Students' Front:**  
[abitsu.org](http://abitsu.org)

**Free Burma:**  
[Free-Burma.org](http://Free-Burma.org)





# Unembedded in Iraq

Now a reknowned war correspondent, Dahr Jamail was working in 2003 as a freelance writer and a mountain guide in Alaska’s Denali National Park while the mainstream media was hyping the invasion of Iraq..

“I had done all the usual actions of attempting to speak up and effect change at home — calling and writing Senators/Congresspeople, attending teach-ins, spreading information,” Jamail said in a Dec. 2004 interview with antiwar.com. “I knew then that the minds of the American public had been misled by the corporate media who mindlessly supported the objectives of the Bush regime, and [that] reporting the true effects of the invasion/occupation on the Iraqi people and U.S. soldiers was what I needed to do.”

Jamail, a fourth-generation Lebanese American, saved his money, bought a ticket to Iraq, and began posting frontline dispatches on his blog, dahrjamailiraq.com. As the insurgency expanded and the mainstream media retreated into well-guarded enclaves, his unembedded coverage brought to life everything from the day-to-day struggles of Iraqis living under occupation to the U.S. atrocities in the first Battle of Fallujah.

The following excerpts are from *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*, a synthesis of Jamail’s reporting from 2003-2005, which will be released by Haymarket Books on Oct. 15.

## STAGE-MANAGED LIBERATION

*Writing from Baghdad in early December of 2003, Dahr Jamail described two street scenes typical of life under the U.S.-run Coalition Provisional Authority.*

Roughly 500 people, who conveniently lined up on the street in front of the journalist-filled Palestine Hotel, were preparing to march the few blocks toward Firdos Square. Out in front was a line of young children, roughly ten years of age, carrying small bouquets of flowers. Following them were two drummers and a very bad trumpet player who blew the same terrible song over and over as the procession made its way down the street. Many in the crowd carried banners that read, “Thank You CPA for Freeing Iraq,” and others

of similar content, while armed guards buffeted the small group from the public. As they marched past concrete blast barriers that had “Troops Out Now” and “America go home!” spray-painted in red in English on them, the tiny procession wasn’t too convincing to the few on-lookers who were present. (This was the first of many stage-managed “demonstrations” I was to witness in occupied Iraq.)

Walking back to our hotel, we passed a small, decrepit petrol station with two lines of cars stretching as far as we could see,

## BECHTEL LEAVES IRAQIS HIGH AND DRY

*Barely a week after the fall of Baghdad, on April 17, 2003, the San Francisco-based Bechtel Corporation was awarded a “cost-plus-fixed-fee” contract worth up to \$680 million for reconstruction projects in Iraq. Its mandate included rebuilding Iraq’s much-needed water-treatment plants. In January 2004, Jamail ventured south of Baghdad to investigate Bechtel’s work on the water infrastructure.*

The first city we came upon was Hilla, 60 miles south of Baghdad. We pulled off the paved highway onto a bumpy road. Leaving a growing plume

of dust behind us, we slowly approached a crumbling farmhouse situated amid vegetable fields and date palms.

An old man with a weathered face that bore the attrition of exhaustion met us in front of his home. His first words to us were a plea for help — for drinking water, for some work, for anything that could ease his struggle. As we spoke with him, he walked us to a scrappy water pump that sat lifeless near an empty container. A rubber hose cracked from the blistering sun was coiled limply on the dirt, near a hole that he said he tried to fill with water with his pump whenever their two hours of electricity appeared. Essentially, they had no electricity, and what little water they did get was loaded with salt from the region, and left those who used it sick with nausea, diarrhea, kidney stones, cramps and cholera. Besides apprising us of the desperate water situation, the old man asked us if we could help him find his cousin. “We just want to know if he’s dead so we can bury the body.”

In a village just outside



Immediately after the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003, U.S. forces raided a secondary school and detained 16 children for having a “pro-Saddam Hussein demonstration.”

waiting for gas. There was a separate line for black-marketers, who were lined up with their jerrycans and plastic jugs awaiting their chance. The black market was burgeoning. Those who could afford the extra cost were less willing to wait in the ever-lengthening lines as the gas crisis worsened. The black-marketers took their plastic jugs to the petrol stations, filled them, walked down the street a few meters and used siphons and plastic funnels to pour gas into the empty tanks of those able to pay a little extra. Everyone from small children to elderly men on crutches was doing this. Meanwhile short-tempered Iraqis

were jamming their cars toward the pumps, some having slept overnight in their cars in order to keep their place in line.

“And the Americans try to tell us this war was not about our oil,” yelled a man while pushing his car. He agreed to talk with us as long as we stayed out of his way. “Even under that bastard Saddam we never had benzene [gasoline] shortages!” I’d seen these lines all over Baghdad. Gas lines were so thick in some areas that traffic would often get choked down to a single lane, further aggravating the already impossible chaos of Baghdad’s auto congestion.

of Hilla, several men told a similar story. There was no running water to speak of and barely two to four hours of electricity per day, during which they tried to run their feeble pumps to draw contaminated water from a polluted stream for their families to use. An old man named Hussin Hamsa Nagem bemoaned, “We are all sick with stomach problems and kidney stones. Our crops are dying.”

Later that afternoon, at another small village between Hilla and Najaf, we found that fifteen hundred people had no other source of drinking water than the dirty stream that trickled by their homes. Most people in the village suffered from dysentery, many had developed kidney stones, and a huge number had cholera.

After spending a night in Najaf, we visited yet another village on the outskirts of the city. Here, the people had taken an initiative and collected funds from each house in order to install new pipes. But in the absence of regular electricity and water from the Najaf center, their initiative could bear no fruit. The villagers had dug a large hole in the ground, where they tapped into already existing pipes to siphon water. At night, when there was a supply of electricity, water from the tapped pipes collected in the dirt hole. The morning of our visit, we watched the operation. Children stood around as women collected what little bit of dirty water remained in the bottom of the hole.

Here, too, waterborne diseases such as dysentery and cholera, plus nausea, diarrhea, and kidney stones, were widespread. Women had to walk half a mile down to a stream to collect water for their homes. In the same stream other women had to do their water-related chores, like dishes and

laundry. Eight children from the village had been killed when attempting to cross the busy highway on their way to a nearby factory in order to retrieve clean water. Some children had even drowned in this stream while collecting water.

Mr. Mehdi was the engineer and assistant manager at the Najaf water distribution center. With help from the ICRC and the Spanish Army, the center had initiated some of the rebuilding on its own. Mehdi told me Bechtel had begun working on the Arzaga Water Project to help bring water into the city center of Najaf. He said Bechtel had started the previous month, painting buildings, cleaning and repairing storage tanks, and repairing and replacing sand filters. This was the only project Mehdi knew of that Bechtel had been working on in Najaf. He told us, “Bechtel is repairing some water facilities, but not improving the electricity any, which is also their responsibility. Their work has not produced any more clean water than what we already had. Bechtel has not spoken with us, or promised to help us do anything else.” There had been no work on desalinization, which was critical in the area, nor any other purification processes.

I asked Mehdi how successful Bechtel had been in restoring electrical service to his water facility. “At least thirty percent of Najaf doesn’t have clean water because of lack of electricity,” he said. Najaf has a population of roughly 600,000 people. Bechtel had claimed it would have the Najaf sewage treatment plant fully restored and functioning by June 2004. (When I was in Iraq from April through June 2004, the treatment plant was still not functioning anywhere near capacity.)



A man in a village in southern Iraq demonstrates how Bechtel left his village without access to clean water.



FROM BECHTEL’S BROKEN WATER PUMPS TO THE BATTLE OF FALLUJAH, DAHR JAMAIL’S UPCOMING NEW BOOK TELLS THE STORY OF THE OCCUPATION THROUGH IRAQ’S EYES.

FALLUJAH UNDER SIEGE

*Following the deaths of four Blackwater mercenaries in Fallujah on March 31, 2004, U.S. forces besieged the city. Reports of hundreds of civilians being killed helped spark joint Sunni and Shiite revolts that nearly overwhelmed the U.S. occupation. Facing an international outcry, Coalition Provisional Authority head L. Paul Bremer, III announced on April 9 “a unilateral suspension of offensive operations in Fallujah.” The following day, Jamail and other journalists joined a humanitarian-aid convoy to Fallujah to find a city still under attack.*

Fallujah seemed devoid of all people other than groups of mujahedeen who stood on every other street corner. Most residents had either evacuated or chosen to hide in their homes. The marines had occupied the northeastern edge of Fallujah, but most of the town was occupied by local Sunni as well as Shi’ite members of Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mehdi Army, who had come in from Baghdad and the south. There seemed to be separate groups of mujahedeen in charge of different parts of the city and the various roads in and out of it. Between the clearly marked territories of the mujahedeen and the marines was a no-man’s-land. Sounds of sporadic gunfire, warplanes and bombs were punctuated by an electrically charged silence, a push-pull of frenetic deadly action followed by more of the dreadful, anticipatory silence.

We rolled toward the one small clinic where we were to deliver our medical supplies. The small clinic was managed by Maki al-Nazzal, who was hired just four days ago. He was not a doctor. The other makeshift clinic in Fallujah was in a mechanic’s garage. He had barely slept in the past week, nor had any of the doctors at the small clinic. Originally, the clinic had just three doctors, but since the U.S. military bombed one of the hospitals and were currently sniping at people as they attempted to enter or exit the main hospital, effectively there were only these two small clinics treating the entire city.

The boxes of medical supplies we brought into the clinic were torn open immediately by the desperate doctors. A woman entered, slapping her chest and

face, and wailing as her husband carried in the dying body of her little boy. Blood was trickling off one of his arms, which dangled out of his father’s arms. Thus began my witnessing of an endless stream of women and children who had been shot by the U.S. soldiers and were now being raced into the dirty clinic, the cars speeding over the curb out front, and weeping family members carrying in their wounded. One eighteen-year-old girl had been shot through the neck. She was making breathy gurgling noises as the doctors frantically worked on her amid her muffled moaning. Flies dodged the working hands of doctors to return to the patches of her vomit that stained her black abaya.

Her younger brother, a small child of ten with a gunshot wound in his head from a marine sniper, his eyes glazed and staring into space, continually vomited as the doctors raced to save his life while family members cried behind me. “The Americans cut our electricity days ago, so we cannot vacuum the vomit from his throat,” a furious doctor told me. They were both loaded into an ambulance and rushed toward Baghdad, only to die en route.

Another small child lay on a blood-spattered bed, also shot by a sniper. The boy’s grandmother lay nearby, shot as she was attempting to carry children from their home and flee the city. She lay on a bed dying, still clutching a bloodied white surrender flag. Hundreds of families were trapped in their homes, terrorized by U.S. snipers shooting from rooftops and the minarets of mosques whenever they saw someone move past a window.

Blood bags were being kept in a food refrigerator, warmed under running water before being given to patients. There were no anesthetics. The lights went out as the generator ran dry of fuel, so the doctors, who had been working for days on end, worked by light provided by men holding up cigarette lighters or flashlights as the sun set. Needless to say, there was no air-conditioning inside the steamy “clinic.”

One victim of the U.S. military aggression after another was brought into the clinic, nearly all of them women and children, carried by weeping family members. Those who had not been hit by bombs from warplanes had been shot by U.S. snipers. The one functioning ambulance left at this clinic sat outside with bullet holes in the sides and a small group of shots right on the driver side of the windshield. The driver, his head bandaged from being grazed by the

bullet of a sniper, refused to go collect any more of the dead and wounded.

Standing near the ambulance in frustration, Maki told us, “They [U.S. soldiers] shot the ambulance and they shot the driver after they checked his car, inspected his car, and knew that he was carrying nothing. Then they shot him. And then they shot the ambulance.

... The stream of patients slowed to a sporadic influx as night fell. Maki sat with me as we shared cigarettes in a small office in the rear of the clinic. “For all my life, I believed in American democracy,” he told me with an exhausted voice. “For 47 years, I had accepted the illusion of Europe and the United States being good for the world, the carriers of democracy and freedom. Now I see that it took me 47 years to wake up to the horrible truth. They are not here to bring anything like democracy or freedom.”



According to residents and doctors in Falluja, U.S. military snipers were killing so many people and shooting so often that residents were forced to turn a soccer field into a cemetery.

SHOOT FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS NEVER

*Shortly after the first Battle of Fallujah, Jamail returned to Baghdad to find a people being ground down by the war.*

Seventeen-year-old Amir was crying during much of the interview. “We were coming home from work, and were shot so many times,” he said with deep anguish and frustration. “Walid told me to leave the car because he was hurt and needed help.”

Walid Mohammed Abraham was a carpenter, and Amir worked as his apprentice. On May 13, U.S. troops occupying an Iraqi police station in the al-Adhamiya district of Baghdad gunned down their small car as they traveled home after a long day of work.

“I still can’t believe Walid is killed,” whimpered Amir, crying inside the home of Abraham’s brother. “He is like my brother, he was so decent and honest. So many people are killed because of their crazy, haphazard shooting.” U.S. troops riddled the car with more than 25 bullets. While they were driving past an Iraqi police station, a resistance fighter fired upon

the station from a building on nearly the opposite end of the station from their car. But, being the closest moving object, Walid and Amir were the most convenient suspected targets.

Abraham’s brother, Khalid Mohammed Abraham, was beside himself with grief. “All my brother was doing was coming home from work.” He explained that his brother was a kind man, with no involvement in the resistance, and did not even own a weapon. “Why has my brother been killed? They searched his car and knew he was innocent. All we seek is for God to give us patience to deal with such conditions.”

Later that afternoon, I went to the home of an Iraqi policeman who had been at the station that night and who agreed to confirm the incident on condition of anonymity. He said Mr. Abraham had passed the police station on his way home to Adhamiya at 2:00 a.m.

Due to much celebratory gunfire earlier in the night, following the Iraqi soccer team’s victory over Saudi Arabia, which earned them a trip to the Olympics, U.S. soldiers had occupied the police station in the district. The police report of the incident stated that Abraham’s car was shot 29 times, with Abraham suffering two gunshots in the head and five in the chest. Another policeman who was at the station when the incident occurred, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said that when several men attempted to pull Abraham from the car, U.S. troops opened fire on them. “This is the usual policy of the Americans. They always shoot first, because there is nobody to punish them for their mistakes.”

“It was the Americans who shot Mr. Abraham, and not Iraqi police, because none of us were even allowed on the roof,” he stated firmly, before adding that he personally had between 150 to 200 files of incidents in which U.S. occupation forces had killed innocent Iraqis, and that several other Iraqi policemen at his station had a similar number.



Bodies in a cooler at the morgue of Baghdad’s Yarmouk Hospital. Even before the Jan. 30, 2005 elections, morgues across the capital city were filled to capacity on nearly a daily basis.



# Iraq's Surging Refugee Crisis

BY DAVID ENDERS

DAMASCUS, Syria — Salam and Hanan's sixth-month-old son Hamoudi will probably not grow up in Baghdad. He will have lots of company.

Salam\* and Hanan are two of the approximately two million Iraqi refugees living in Syria and Jordan. They left Baghdad in June after their house was raided by militiamen because Salam worked as an accountant for the Iraqi government inside the green zone. He decided to take a leave from his job after that, but it seems unlikely he will return. He was also threatened by members of a political party inside the Iraqi government after filing a report that implicated members of the party of embezzlement and corruption.

Their savings are running out, but Hanan and Hamoudi will try and stay in Damascus even if Salam decides to return.

The lights suddenly go out in their small apartment. Damascus now has rolling blackouts, a function of the sprawl that is driven in large part by Iraqis. The hospitals, schools and other infrastructure, in a country that already suffers from problematic unemployment, are being further taxed.

Since the U.S. military instituted its "troop surge," hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have fled their homes.

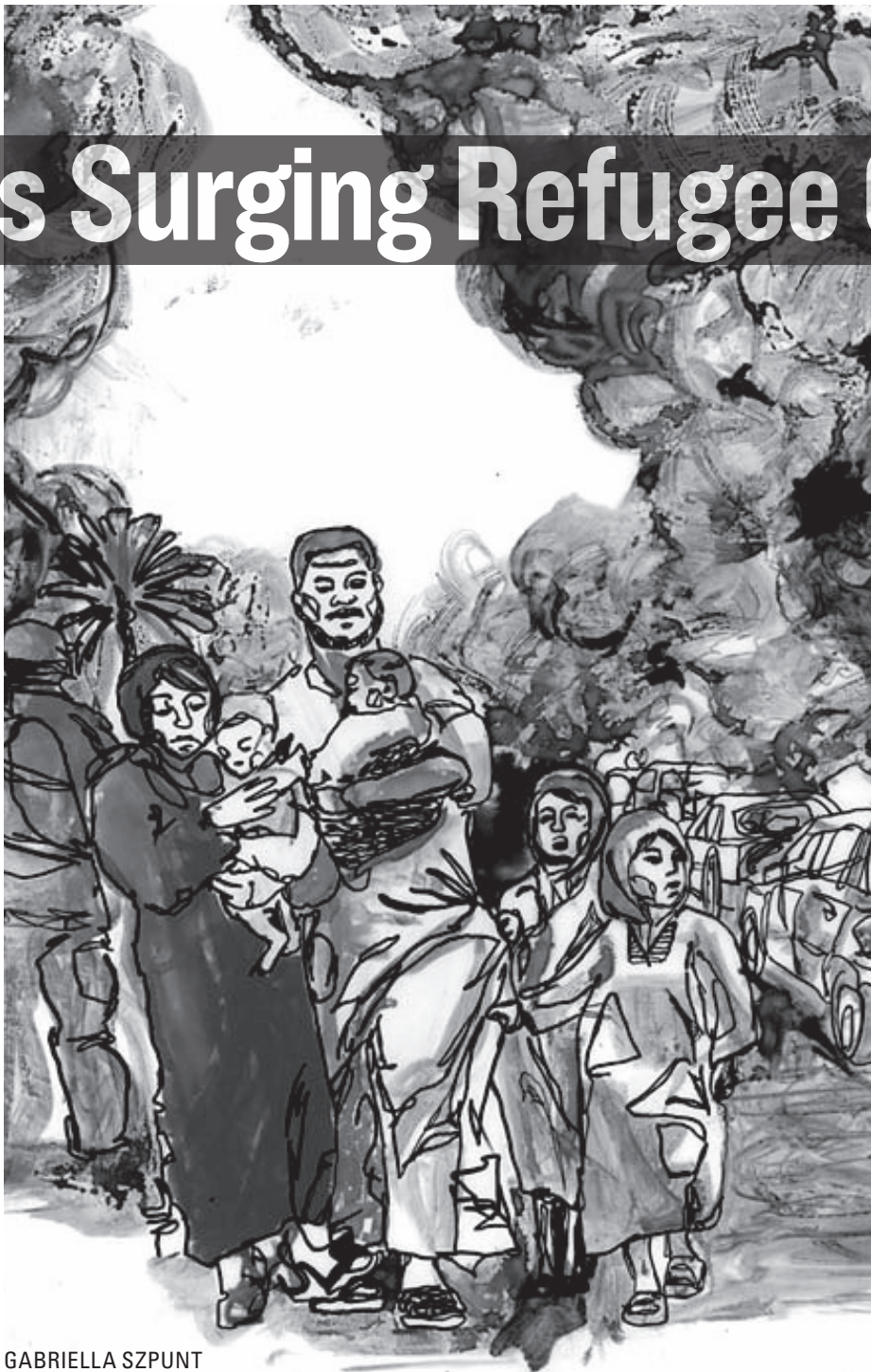
The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has said its office will try to refer as many as 20,000 Iraqis for resettlement by the end of the year. Some 3,000 have been referred for asylum already.

A major part of the problem is the lack of willingness amongst industrialized countries to accept Iraqis, who now make up the largest single group of people seeking asylum in the world. The U.S. took 200 Iraqi asylees last year and says it will take as many as 7,000 in 2007.

As of mid-August, 47 Iraqis had been resettled this year through UNHCR referrals in any country, and progress has been so slow in resettling Iraqis in the U.S. that U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, sent a message to the State Department earlier this month sharply criticizing the process.

"Resettlement takes too long," Crocker wrote, according to *The Washington Post*. The Department of Homeland Security, which is in charge of interviewing Iraqis for resettlement, has only a handful of officers in Syria to conduct interviews, which UNHCR officials confirmed has slowed the process. By Crocker's estimation, it would take two years for DHS to interview Iraqis already referred by the U.N. Even that number is a statistical drop in the bucket.

Syria is the last country whose borders are open to Iraqis, and there are approximately 1.5 million of them here. With more than half a million Palestinians in addition to the more recent Iraqi arrivals, Syria has the highest number of refugees per capita of any country in the world. The Syrian government, after meetings with Iraqi officials in Damascus in August, said it would begin requiring visa for Iraqis in the coming months.



GABRIELLA SZPUNT

Hanan's brother Bashar left Baghdad to avoid conscription in the Jeish al-Mehdi, the militia nominally loyal to political leader Moqtada al-Sadr that was fighting for control of his neighborhood in southern Baghdad. He spent his last months in Iraq unable to work and mostly in hiding, sometimes at his parents' house, sometimes at the house of another sister who lived in a safer neighborhood, but the house became crowded as other relatives fled sectarian fighting and cleansing in other parts of the capital.

Bashar has been out of Iraq for more than a year. In the last six months he has tried three times to cross into Jordan, where he has been promised a job, but he has been rejected by Jordanian border guards each time. Going back to Iraq is not an option.

"I don't have any opportunity to change my life," he said. "I want start my life. It's frozen."

"The refugee issue has been discussed and the Syrian government said that big numbers of Iraqis create an economic pressure," said Ali al-Dabagh, a spokesman for al-Maliki who traveled to Syria in August for talks with the Syrian government. "We are aware of this kind of pressure. With the Syrian government calling Iraqi guests and not refugees, the Iraqi government has agreed to take concrete steps towards helping the Syrian economy by supplying the Iraqis with healthcare and education, and humanitarian aid."

Officials from the Syrian government declined comment on the issue.

Most Iraqis in Syria, who initially hoped their stay would last only months, are looking for third countries to emigrate to. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have registered with the U.N. office in Damascus for approximately 11,000 spaces available for resettlement in other countries.

## TOO POOR TO FLEE IRAQ

The situation inside Iraq is dire. As the months wear on, many of the more than one million refugees inside the country receive virtually no aid from the Iraqi government. These are the people who lack the money or agency to obtain a passport to leave the country, or could not afford to leave the country if they have a passport. Many have simply been driven from their homes, leaving most of their belongings and having lost their greatest asset.

Sabieh Fayhaa walks half a kilometer to a nearby hose to fill empty bottles and then walks back to the building she squats on the edge of Chikook, a neighborhood in northwest Baghdad that is now home to approximately 650 families who have been driven from their homes in villages and cities around Baghdad by sectarian violence. But her greatest concern is the lack of medical care — she suffers from asthma and one of her daughters has epilepsy. Like many of the children of families that have been displaced, neither of her daughters attends school.

"I have nothing. I've lost everything. I have no money to buy medicine."

The men in Chikook say that despite the increase in U.S. and Iraqi military operations in and around Baghdad since February, it is still too unsafe to try to return to their homes.

"Many families tried to return to their neighborhood and they were killed on the way," says Abu Ahmed from Meda'en, a mostly Shiite village southeast of Baghdad. "My son is in the national guard, and I am too scared to send him back to our village. There are Sunni checkpoints on the road and they will kill any Shiite there."

Such families are known as mohajereen, Arabic for "the displaced." Even here, in this

## FOUR MILLION IRAQI REFUGEES STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE IN AN INCREASINGLY HOSTILE REGION

mostly Shiite enclave that is controlled by the Jeish Al-Mehdi, the residents say they are not entirely safe, and that the neighborhood is occasionally shelled by guerillas from nearby Sunni neighborhoods, and that drive-by shootings and kidnappings also occur.

But most pressing is the lack of services. The offices of Tayyera Sadrieen, the political party allied with the Jeish al-Mehdi, had provided donations of food and cooking gas in the first months, but now supplies and donations have dropped off.

The deputy director of the Iraqi Red Crescent in Baghdad said the Iraqi government and the Red Crescent have fallen short so far in meeting the demand for aid. The UNHCR estimates the number of refugees inside Iraq is increasing at a rate of between 80,000 to 100,000 each month. Some of the same tribes and guerilla groups that drove the families in Chikook from their homes are now working with the U.S. military under what is being termed "reconciliation."

## MAROONED IN JORDAN

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis now find themselves virtually marooned in Jordan. For the moment, most Jordanians take a congenial view toward Iraqis in the country and refer to them as "guests," despite the burden they pose on Jordan's already scarce natural resources and the inflation that has come with this refugee influx equal to about 10 percent of the country's entire population of approximately 7 million.

UNHCR offers health care and education to Iraqis in Jordan and is making plans to expand its operation as the number of Iraqis applying for assistance increases. Though UNHCR publications refer to resettlement of Iraqi refugees as the only "durable solution," it has so far referred fewer than four thousand Iraqis to third countries.

"I think all of us are still hoping that there is movement toward a political solution within Iraq, that these people will have the opportunity to return," said Imran Khan, the UNHCR representative in Amman.

But many Iraqis in Amman don't believe that a solution will be reached anytime soon and do not believe they will be returning anytime soon. Twenty-four-year-old Jewad said he fled Baghdad in 2005 after militiamen accused him of selling cars to a rival militia and tortured him.

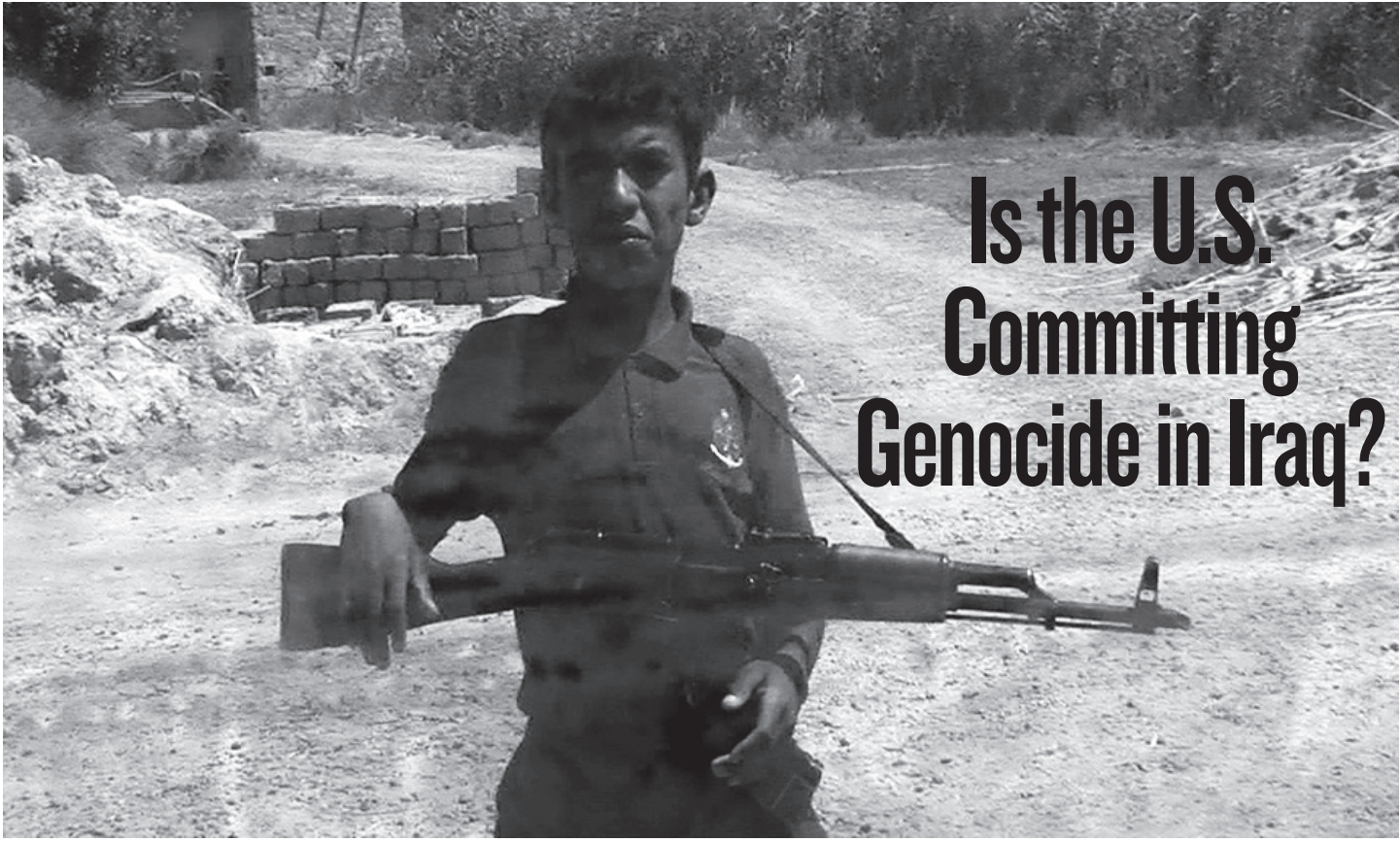
Like many Iraqis in Amman, his Jordanian visa is long expired and he fears deportation. He works illegally, and Iraqis are frequently exploited, especially on construction crews. He chain smokes and breaks down in tears while telling his story.

"I went to the Dutch embassy and no one would let me in. It is expensive to go to these embassies. My rent is \$100 dollars a month. I don't know what to do. We don't eat lunch sometimes."

\*Names changed to protect identities.

*David Enders covered Iraq for Free Speech Radio News from 2003-2007 and is the author of Baghdad Bulletin: Dispatches on the American Occupation. A longer version of this article originally ran in the St. Louis Post Dispatcher.*





A member of a Sunni militia in Iraq's Anbar province. PHOTO: RICK ROWLEY/BIG NOISE-FILM.ORG

By A.K. GUPTA

There is a simple rule that defines the U.S. occupation of Iraq: no matter how bad a situation may seem the reality is far worse.

Take torture. Individual accounts began surfacing in the fall of 2003 at U.S.-run prisons, but the Abu Ghraib scandal that erupted the following spring unmasked a regime of industrial-scale torture.

Or take the number of Iraqi dead. By 2004 it was believed to be in the thousands but no one thought, as two rigorous studies found, that some 98,000 Iraqis had died by the fall of '04 or that a mind-boggling 655,000 had died by June 2006.

Or take refugees. The U.S. military and ethnic militias are known to have caused massive displacement, but few could imagine that nearly one in five Iraqis, at least 4.7 million people, would have been driven from their homes by the fall of 2007.

Then there's "random killings." Two new revelations point to how many killings stem from systemic forces. Foreign mercenaries are called the most-hated men in Iraq, but who knew that Blackwater, the most notorious hired gun in Iraq, had been involved in "nearly 200 shootings in Iraq since 2005"? Mercenary killings could number in the thousands as Blackwater's record does not appear to be out of line with the 100 other mercenary outfits in Iraq. The Washington Post reported in June that "one security company reported nearly 300 'hostile actions' in the first four months" of 2007.

And there are killings by U.S. forces, which happen at checkpoints, on patrol and during home raids. Now it seems these killings are a matter of policy in some instances. Reports indicate that military commanders pressed troops to rack up "body counts," despite declamations otherwise. Some snipers were apparently instructed to leave weaponry lying around and shoot anyone who picked it up.

Despite this hell we've created, Hillary Clinton, John Edwards and Barack Obama reject a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq before 2013 — the end of the next presidential term. They appear committed to ensuring the conflict becomes the longest-running war in U.S. history.

But they couldn't advocate a never-ending war unless a majority of the public believed G.I.s are there to protect Iraqis. One of the great myths of the Iraq War is that the U.S. military buffers religious and ethnic factions who have been at each others' throats since time immemorial.

What's curious is that many opponents of the Iraq War, a group marked by its loathing

of Bush, essentially accept his latest rationale for staying the course: that a "humanitarian nightmare" could result if U.S. forces withdrew. They are in effect arguing that we must continue to slaughter Iraqis for years on end lest someone else possibly do so in the future.

To maintain that U.S. troops are there to protect civilians, it is necessary to discredit the enormity of the killing. This is a problem within the peace movement as many shy away from discussing the impact of the Iraq War except to discuss how it affects "us." For example, United for Peace & Justice has easily accessible information on its website about U.S. casualties and the financial costs of the war, but nothing about the extent of Iraqi deaths.

According to a study published in the British medical journal The Lancet in October 2006, some 655,000 excess Iraqi deaths occurred from the March 2003 invasion to June of 2006. In 45 percent of cases of violent death, the perpetrator was listed as unknown, 31 percent was attributed to "the coalition" and 24 percent to "other." Thus, U.S. and U.K. forces were responsible for the deaths of 185,000 Iraqis in barely three years. Air strikes were responsible for about 78,000 deaths.

A more recent survey by ORB, a British polling firm, is more shocking still. It reported in September that it polled 1,499 Iraqi adults and came up with a figure of 1.22 million dead. The scale of the killing is so great that it raises the question: Is the United States committing genocide in Iraq?

This issue has dominated the response to the Darfur conflict. In an influential essay last March titled "The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War and Insurgency," African scholar Mahmood Mamdani likened the violence in the Sudan region to U.S.-occupied Iraq, noting that in Iraq "it is said to be a cycle of insurgency and counter-insurgency; in Darfur, it is called genocide." Mamdani does not say so, but the implication is clear: If Darfur is genocide, then why not Iraq?

Numbers do not a genocide make. Intent is needed. And that's where things get fuzzy (and political). According to the U.N. Convention on Genocide, one standard is "intent to destroy, in whole or in part" of a group. Iraq, then, is most definitely genocide — this is what happened in Fallujah. More than that, virtually all the Sunni Arab regions have been subjected to extreme levels of violence.

I contacted some of the researchers involved in the two Lancet studies on excess mortality in Iraq, Gilbert Burnham and Richard Garfield (who was involved in only the 2004 study), and statistician, Shannon Doocy. They found in the second study that the excess death rate amounted to 7.8 per thousand per year in a population of 27 million.

In the 2006 study, they stated "the highest death rates [are] much where they would be expected, in the Sunni Arab provinces." Garfield, a professor at Columbia University, added the death rates were highest in these provinces because "that's where most of the military-reported deaths were occurring."

This backs up reports that it is the U.S. war that has killed more Sunni Arabs. The strategy has been to depopulate towns and cities or at least large swaths — Fallujah, Tal Afar, Al Qaim, Ramadi, Samara and others — through blockades, cutting off food, fuel and electricity, mass arrests and aerial bombardment. The goal was to turn these towns into free-fire zones where anyone left could be killed, no questions asked.

In the case of Fallujah, during the November 2004 razing, an AP photographer watched entire neighborhoods turned to rubble from a bombardment so devastating civilians were too afraid to even step outside — implying many never fled. When he tried to leave the city, he witnessed "U.S. helicopters firing on and killing people who tried to cross the river," including a family of five. From this and other anecdotal accounts, the goal appeared to be wholesale extermination.

With a scarcity of independent reporting from other towns that the U.S. military turned into battlefields, it's not known what the effects were. So I asked the researchers to crunch the numbers for 13 "clusters" in the four Sunni Arab-majority provinces — Anbar, Diyala, Ninewa and Salah al-Din.

The researchers used a method called "cluster-sample survey." Garfield says 20 to 25 are needed "to get a representative sample," but they choose 50 clusters to give added precision. Iraqi surveyors sampled 40 houses in each cluster, which were spread around the country.

They cautioned a smaller sample meant a larger margin of error. But aggregating the four does reduce some of the added uncertainty. It appears that the excess death rate for the four Sunni Arab provinces is nearly twice the national rate of 7.8 — 14.5 per thousand per year. This may mean that almost 1.5 percent of people in these provinces, mainly Sunni Arabs, are being killed year after year.

It's also probable that Sunni Arabs are being displaced at a higher rate. Much has been made of an alleged drop in civilian casualties in September, but this maybe more due to widespread ethnic cleansing. One recent report noted that in Baghdad, home to one-quarter of Iraq's population, "U.S. military officers say [the capital] has gone from being 65 percent Sunni to being 75 percent Shiite."

Seymour Hersh argues that "The surge means basically that, in some way, the president has accepted ethnic cleansing." This works two ways. Reporter Rick Rowley, who just returned from Anbar Province, says that some of the Sunni militias being set up and armed by the Pentagon have been violently displacing thousands of Shiites.

This is where intent starts to creep in. Ahmed Hashim, author of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq, writes that the Bush administration "thought that the Sunnis could be treated with disdain, discounted and swept aside with little in the way of adverse reaction."

This is a long way from genocide, but this is the attitude that defined the beginning of the occupation, which progressed into collective punishment, mass detentions, torture, massacres such as Haditha, "baiting" programs, Fallujah and possibly 1.2 million dead Iraqis.

What many in the antiwar movement fail to see is that by raising the question that the occupation may be genocidal in nature, we allow the myth of U.S. benevolence to live on in future wars, such as the looming one against Iran. Peace activists have shied away from talking about Iraqi deaths; the focus is mainly on U.S. casualties. But this historical narcissism ensures that the public remains primed for war after war.

An Iraqi woman searches for water. PHOTO: RICK ROWLEY/BIG NOISEFILM.ORG





# Epic Escapism

*Into the Wild*  
DIRECTED BY SEAN PENN  
PARAMOUNT VANTAGE

An adventure epic that will likely grab you by the heart but leave you feeling disillusioned and helpless, *Into the Wild* follows the story of 24-year-old Christopher McCandless' two-year cross-country trek from college graduation to his deathbed in the Alaskan wilderness. When his body was found decomposing in an old bus near Denali National Park in 1992, McCandless' story captured the attention of best-selling author Jon Krakauer. Krakauer's 1996 biography in turn deeply inspired director Sean Penn, who spent the last ten years making the film.

Penn demonstrates his commitment to McCandless' story by carefully following 22-year-old Emile Hirsch, who plays McCandless, from Georgia to Arizona, South Dakota, the Gulf of California and ultimately to Alaska, and by including clips of McCandless speaking aloud his thoughts and scribbling letters and entries in his journal — some of which are actually written across the screen in large yellow letters.

Although Penn tells this tale with a degree of authenticity and beauty, he fails to deliver a story rooted in historical context and contemporary cultural dialogue. This film falls short on transcending America's shallow fascination with the wandering romantic intellectual.

To understand why a top student at Emory University would donate his \$24,500 savings, burn his social security card, sever ties to his wealthy family and head west alone to seek truth by hitch-hiking, walking and train-hopping, one must look deep into American history. Moviegoers cannot forget that the realities of America today are the direct result of a three century-long push for progress from East to West coast, by the conquest of native indigenous cultures and conversion of the natural landscape through the barrel of a gun and the uncompromising righteousness of the European pilgrims and settlers. Today's American is raised in the richest nation on earth, in a culture of materialism and consumerism, classism and rugged individualism, which encourages us "to be all we can be" within the hollow existence of the solo American dream.

While McCandless is clearly dissatisfied with his privileged life and with his parents' wish for him to pursue a law degree at Harvard University, Penn fails to take a



GABRIELLA SZPUNT

## Racism From Bayou to Desert

Hurricane Katrina never ended. The flood continues to carry people away from New Orleans, beyond the headlines and past the reach of our sympathy. It left thousands of homeless Americans stranded in cities without the light of a news camera to act as a halo. Once victims drowning on TV, they stepped off planes, tired and shocked and needing a place to live. As they arrived, sympathy became fear, and the same racism that walled them into poverty in New Orleans began to grow around them again.

*Desert Bayou*, the new documentary by Alex LeMay, sidesteps the easy story of devastation, refusing to add to the stock narrative of disaster tourism. Instead, LeMay packed camera and microphone and went to Utah, where 600 evacuees were taken without choice to live surrounded by white people and cold mountains.

The contrast between the promised help and the real suspicion is what gives *Desert Bayou* its initial drama. Numbed evacuees step on dry ground — and their bags are immediately searched. They are taken to Utah's Camp

Williams military base to live inside gates and under a curfew. Tight-faced residents explain that the measures are for the evacuees' own good, but under their words runs an electric current of fear. A dramatic high point of the documentary is the district attorney's charge that many of the evacuees are rapists and murderers. The allegations prove false, but he is never held accountable for his statements. The scene eerily reflects the stories of rape and murder that swirled around the Superdome, almost all of which were shown to be hysteria. *Desert Bayou* catches this contradiction and magnifies it, giving us a foundation narrative about the uneasy aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The national spasm of shock and grief was read as real American feeling in contrast to the apathetic government response. Yet as LeMay shows, the institutional racism that paralyzed government response rises to the surface once the evacuees enter our lives as real people with real needs.

LeMay has an obvious love for the two main characters, Curtis Pleasant and Clifford Andrews, allowing them to expose the reality

*Desert Bayou*  
DIRECTED BY ALEX LEMAY  
CINEMA LIBRE STUDIO, 2007

of their broken lives. Clifford has a crack habit. Disappointed, his girlfriend takes their children back to New Orleans and, alone in Utah, he breaks down. It is here that *Desert Bayou* rises above its genre, giving us a too-brief glimpse into the devastated inner life of a man who has barely survived racism and poverty and flood.

LeMay said he went to Camp Williams without a story to tell but with a story to get. His approach is both a strength and weakness. *Desert Bayou* has an easy naturalistic rhythm but the film doesn't come into emotional focus until the end. It does not force a story but waits for Curtis and Clifford to open up to the unblinking eye of the camera. When they do, their raw emotions pour down their faces and we see how they carry the flood inside them. We also see their limits as men, trapped within a pain they cannot hold back, pushed into the arms of their wives or the drugs on the street.

New Orleans has become a nostalgic symbol of our failure and resurrecting it has become, for some, a mission. But for survivors like Curtis and Clifford, the city was a trap, a sinkhole of poverty and violence. "In five months I got more done in Utah than I did in five years in New Orleans," Clifford said standing in front of his old house. "It's about them now," he said, looking at his children. His wife gazed at him with hope and helplessness.

Both Curtis and Clifford chose not to return to New Orleans. As for LeMay, he chose not to force a story or impose judgment but to give the men space to reflect on their lives. Even though I wished for more biographical background and more psychological acuity, it is obvious that *Desert Bayou* is a necessary film. As it chronicles the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it shows the people who are still drowning within its waters and those who have just barely found dry land.

—NICHOLAS POWERS

deeper look on how America's tainted and controversial past could possibly have influenced this desire to "get away from it all."

Eco-psychologists contend that a person's mental health can be directly correlated to her or his relationship to the natural world (or lack thereof). The massive destruction of the American environment in the last 150 years by urbanization, the conversion of raw materials into profit and widespread pollution is certainly an overlooked factor in why McCandless might have wanted to flee to wilderness.

Cultural critic and environmentalist Derrick Jensen explored the relationship of his violent father to the historical legacy of the destruction of Western civilization in his 2004 book, *A Language Older than Words*. While Penn does not shy away from exposing McCandless' childhood pain from his patriarchal, abusive father and submissive mother, neither does he explore it further, leaving the viewer blaming McCandless' family rather than society. Fortunately,

ly, Penn allows us some degree of reality to trickle into the film by letting McCandless' sister provide narration of her brother's disappearance and ultimate death.

It is no surprise that McCandless was obsessed with Alaska. The "last frontier" has captured the imaginations and thirst for a life outside of industrial civilization for the last 100 years in American literature from Jack London, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, James Michener and Edward Abbey — authors of several of the books he packed with him across the country. While viewers might be inspired to pick up these authors and a copy of Krakauer's book, the film ought to make a deeper impression on how we can challenge the destructive American paradigm by building sustainable lifestyles more integrated with nature.

It should not be surprising that hordes of New Yorkers packed the theater opening weekend in late September. Cinematographer Eric Gautier, known from his work in *The Motorcycle Diaries*, provides

sweeping views of snow-capped mountains, the Arizona desert and the Midwest prairies, images that are in themselves an escape from a world of right angles and noise, concrete below and a cushion of pollution above.

It is too easy to experience the movie as if it was about fictitious people and places that are

dissimilar and are separate from all of us. This film is not to be digested solely as latest great work of cinema, but rather should be a launching pad for finding greater insight into the perverse and critical socio- and environmental moment.

—JESSICA LEE





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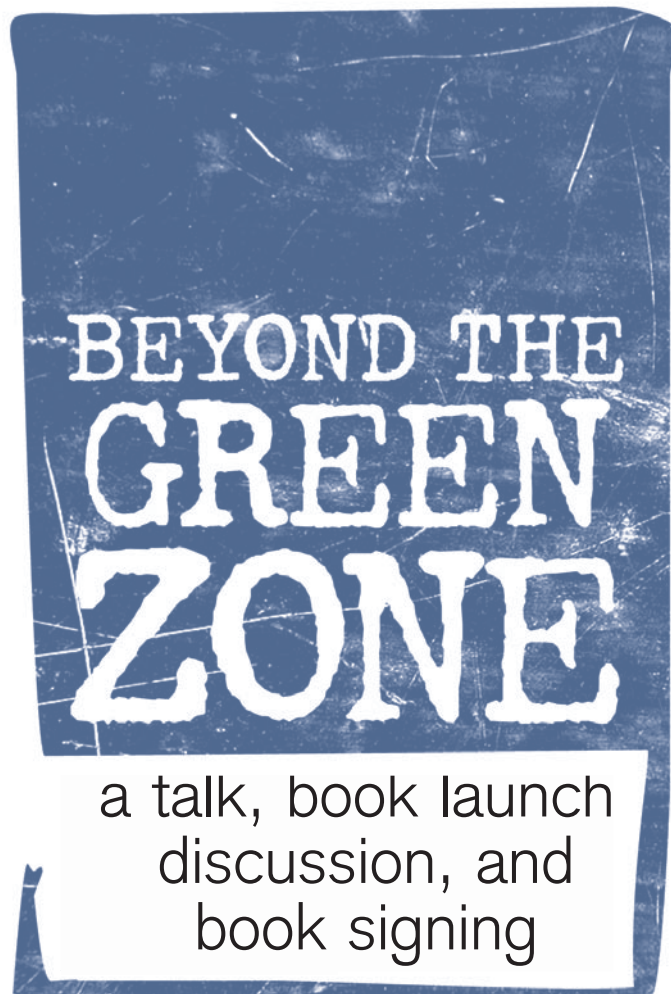
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DISPATCHES FROM AN  
UNEMBEDDED JOURNALIST  
IN OCCUPIED IRAQ**

**DAHR JAMAIL**  
FOREWORD BY AMY GOODMAN



**DAHR JAMAIL** is an independent journalist who has covered the Middle East for more than four years and author of the forthcoming Haymarket book *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from*

*an Unembedded Reporter in Occupied Iraq* (October 2007). He has reported extensively from inside Iraq for eight months and is now writing for the InterPress Service, *The Asia Times*, and many other outlets. His reports have been published in *The Nation*, *The Sunday Herald*, *The Guardian*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, and *The Independent*, among other publications. On radio as well as television, Jamail reports for *Democracy Now!*, and numerous other stations around the globe. Jamail is also special correspondent for *Flashpoints Radio* (KPFA/Pacifica). He has also reported from Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.



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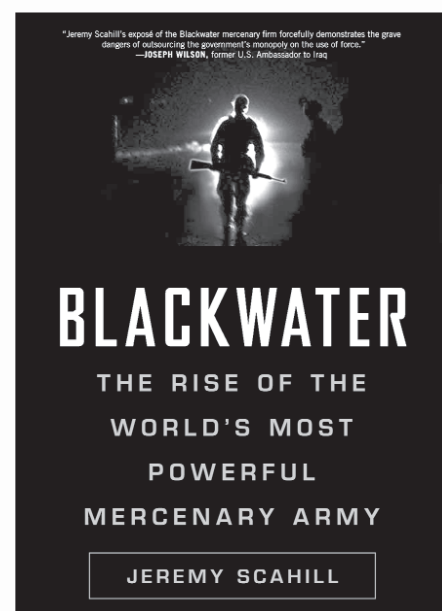
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is an unembedded international journalist, and the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*

(Nation Books). He is a correspondent for the national radio and television show *Democracy Now!* and a frequent contributor to *The Nation* magazine. He is currently a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute. He has reported from Iraq through both the Clinton and Bush administrations. Traveling around the hurricane zone in the wake of Katrina, Scahill exposed the presence of Blackwater mercenaries in New Orleans, and his reporting sparked a Congressional inquiry and an internal Department of Homeland Security investigation. Scahill has won numerous awards, including the prestigious George Polk Award for Foreign Reporting and numerous Project Censored Awards.





## REVIEWS

### FILM

## Tribeca's 'Other' Film Festival

VISIONFEST 2007  
TRIBECA CINEMAS

VisionFest, founded in 2001 as The Guerrilla Film and Video festival, aims to elevate domestic filmmaking to the status of foreign films. Dubbed “the other festival,” the Tribeca-based annual event occasionally unearths films that go on to success at Sundance and elsewhere. Participating films are mostly unrestricted in length and subject matter, and everything from three-minute horror shorts to full-length features are shown side-by-side, loosely organized by theme and genre. This year’s VisionFest, which ran from Sept. 19-23 at Tribeca Cinemas, was a mixed bag with a few gems.

Several films caught our eye. Patrick Smith’s *Puppet* is a humorous and existential treat in traditional hand-drawn animation. Roland Becerra’s *Dear Beautiful*, a 30-minute animated horror feature, blends rich textures and a single-narrative voice to portray an apocalyptic story set behind a Connecticut couple’s deteriorating relationship. *In the House of the Sin Eater*, by Paul Kloss and Mathew Acheson, animates puppets and found objects to create a lush blend of anthropology and fairy-tale.

The horror short *Storage*, by Mark Roush, carries an inventive narrative although cinematically mediocre. Jon Griggs’ *Deviation*, an animated short created with software used for multiplayer video games, suffers from redundant dialog but the unusual form opens the mind to new techniques. Lucas Peltonen’s *Lycanthrope* is a humorous horror romp that’s plagued with cliché characters and plot, leaving the enthusiastic actors space to create memorable moments.

The festival showcased a couple particular films. Vijay Mathew’s *Off Duty* explores a night-long encounter between a Punjabi cab driver and his fare, a wealthy Long Island man who is manipulative and bordering on psychotic. While the story occasionally verges on cliché and melodrama, the numerous plot twists stay both surprising and (barely) believable. Shot with only three cameras and no script (the hour-plus plot entirely improvised), the story nonetheless hangs together with genuine moments of humor, shock and a creeping feeling of alienation associated with all-nighters.

*Pretty in the face*, which made



LEO GARCIA

### BOOKS

## The ABCs of Counter-Recruiting

For the past five years, large marches and rallies have been a semi-annual staple of the antiwar movement. Tens of thousands of people parade to little effect through the empty streets of Washington, D.C. on Saturday afternoons, holding aloft signs declaring that the Iraq War is wrong. But what would happen if large numbers of people — the same people who care enough to come out for these marches or to vote against war-mongering politicians — began directly challenging the Pentagon’s constant need for fresh supplies of troops in their own communities?

In *Army of None*, Aimee Al-

lison and David Solnit provide a handy how-to manual for just such a movement. Allison, a conscientious objector from the first Gulf War, and Solnit, a longtime social-justice organizer, initially take to heart Sun Tze’s ancient advice. (“Know thy enemy, know thyself. A thousand battles, a thousand victories.”) They lead the reader first on a quick, but comprehensive, tour of the slick psychology and tactics of military recruiters and then provide an array of smart tips and talking points for counter-recruiters. Counter-recruiters have had some success in recent years, and the personal accounts of young people and other grassroots organizers also sparkle

*Army of None: Strategies to Counter Military Recruitment, End War and Build a Better World*

By AIMEE ALLISON & DAVID SOLNIT  
SEVEN STORIES PRESS, 2007

throughout the book.

However, because of its practical, can-do bent, *Army of None* does not fully grapple with the scale of the challenge faced by counter-recruiters or specify what is needed to rise to the occasion. The military has a \$4 billion annual recruiting budget, thousands of salesmen/recruiters working 16 hours per day, sophisticated data-gathering operations and nearly unlimited access to many target schools. The war is a drag on their work, but the recruiter’s job is not to convince every young person to be thrilled about the military; it is to identify those youth who are “propensed” to join the military and then reel them in with whatever mix of deceit and fantasy does the job.

For the counter-recruiting movement to make a serious dent in the military’s recruiting efforts, it would need far more resources and committed organizers on the ground building youth-led, grassroots networks that would reach deep into the schools and other community institutions. This would need to happen not just in big cities or liberal college towns (which provide most of the success stories in the book), but in the small, forgotten towns in the interior of the country that are steeped in pro-military culture and provide a disproportionate number of the troops. While this may seem implausible, these are exactly the

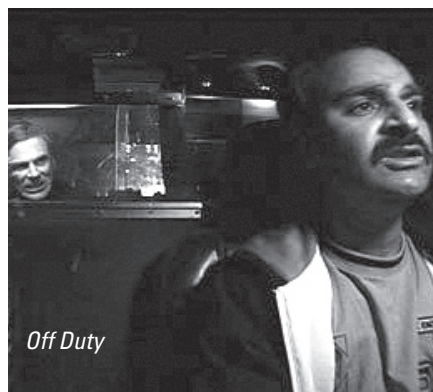
parts of the country that have been the most betrayed by the Bush administration and the war and to which countless disillusioned soldiers are returning.

In the last section of *Army of None*, the authors take a step back to examine the big picture and call for the antiwar movement to adopt a “strategic framework” that moves away from random protests to a concerted, yet decentralized attack on key institutional pillars that make the war machine run smoothly — recruiting, the mainstream media and corporations like Halliburton. These ideas, long and loudly championed by Solnit, sound great on paper and are an improvement on the myopia of leading antiwar coalitions like United for Peace and Justice, ANSWER and the Troops Out Now Coalition.

Still, as long as most dissenters in this country remain content to limit themselves to ritual forms of activism that prioritize self-expression and asserting one’s own moral rectitude, it will be difficult for the patient, day-to-day antiwar organizing envisioned by the authors to take root. But their book is a valuable guide for those ready to try.

—JOHN TARLETON

Authors Aimee Allison and David Solnit will read from *Army of None* Fri. Oct. 12, 7pm, at Bluestockings, 172 Allen St.



its New York debut at VisionFest, made off with the most awards and a positive audience response. New York native Nate Myers moved to Maine for two years to make the film with a minimal crew and no cast (his wife, the only professional actor in the film, plays the lead). The film looks far from a typical low-budget production, however. Long close shots and the use of

non-actors create a genuine awkwardness and discomfort in this exploration of the many manifestations of insecurity. The film builds characters through seemingly random scenes, revealing the interlocking stories of an overweight teenager deeply ashamed of and cruel to his obese mother, and his uncle who cheats on his sexually inexperienced fiancée.

Portraying unpleasant and questionable choices, the film nonetheless manages to be non-judgmental. The ending, while open, doesn’t leave the viewer hanging — if anything, we feel gracefully ejected from these other people’s lives, to return, somewhat shaken and more pensive, to our own.

VisionFest achieves what many festivals aim for — a truly inde-

pendent showcasing of assorted artists in the nascent stages of their careers, warts and all. These films were truly a labor of love, with their frequently microscopic budgets augmenting our appreciation of the filmmakers’ accomplishments.

—IRINA IVANOVA & FRANK REYNOSO



reader comments

Continued from Page 2

ECO-LEGAL UPDATES  
Responses to “The Net Widens: Free Speech on Trial,” September 17.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty in the case of United States v. Eric McDavid. Eric faces 5-20 years in federal prison. His sentencing will be on Dec. 6 at 9 am before Judge England. Please continue to call the jail and request that Eric be given vegan food. Contact info can be found on supporter.org. Thank you all for your support. The struggle is not over.

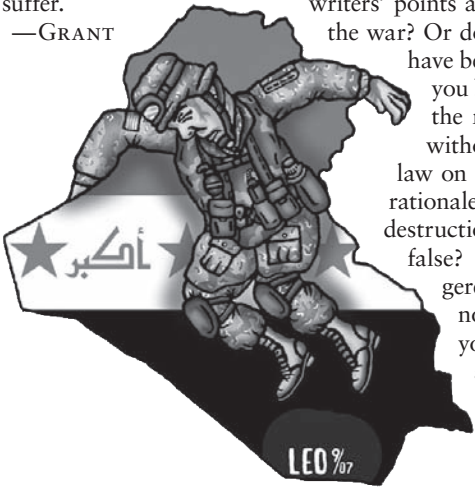
—SPS

IS PRO-GREEN ANTI-HUMAN?  
In response to “Why Green Makes the Right See Red,” September 17.

Green makes the Right see red because, essentially, the Greens of today and the Reds of yesteryear are united by the same basic ethical principle. Unlike Leonardo Da Vinci — one of the perennial fathers of the Enlightenment, civilization, and human happiness — who believed that “man is the measure of all things,” Greens and Reds share a different standard. While Greens and Reds may differ in what they would subjugate actual, individual, human happiness and well-being to — in one case Mother Nature and in the other society at large — both groups share a deeply held commitment to subjugation and self-sacrifice. That the prevailing criticisms of capitalism have moved from complaints about social injustice or economic inefficiency to frantic pronouncements of the inherent destructiveness of production reveals the true intentions of both Reds and Greens. Just as, underneath all of the pretense to the contrary, socialism was never an attempt at social progress, but

a complex jeering of actual social progress, so is environmentalism, at root, a desire not to see the environment flourish, but rather to see humans suffer.

—GRANT



FREEDOM IS NOT FREE  
Responses to “‘Success’ In Iraq,” September 17.

I want to show my support to the troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places of danger. Great job, stay strong! And now I want to show my dissatisfaction with the lack of support to the goal that they are striving to achieve. Maybe I misunderstood something, but they are right when they say that freedom is not free. It has to be won when the time is due. And this is our fight, not only for Iraq, but for our own sake. I disagree with the article; we are not saying enough about how well our heroes are doing on the battlefield and how much more support we need in order to win. Instead, we are telling everybody how little we know about others and how little we know about ourselves. Osama actually pointed out himself these weaknesses. I recommend to follow “teachings” of the enemy of freedom to actually understand why I am so embarrassed reading such articles.

—LIBERAL WITH A HEAD

Liberal with a head: Apart from you thinking that we need more pro-war coverage about the U.S. soldiers, do you want to address the writers’ points about the failure of the war? Or do you believe there have been no failures? Do you believe the U.S. has the right to start wars without international law on its side and with a rationale (weapons of mass destruction) that is patently false? Aren’t you angered by there being no WMDs? Or do you think enough articles about the “good news” that is in Iraq negates no WMDs?

—ANONYMOUS

For more, or to add a comment, visit [indypendent.org](http://indypendent.org).

CORRECTIONS:

In a photo essay on Guatemala (“Fighting for Justice,” Sept. 17) a photo of Mariano Kalel, a community leader and well-known Guatemalan activist, was identified as Hector Reyes, a disappeared Guatemalan farmer. An accompanying picture misidentified women as being members of Reyes’ family; they were, in fact, members of neighboring communities who are unrelated to Reyes. Another man was incorrectly identified as Don Arturo, a resident of the community of La Paz. Further, the sentence, “Twenty-two peasants from nearby communities occupied the landholding in October 2003 to demand explanation from the authorities,” should have read, “Peasants from 22 nearby communities occupied the landholding in October 2003 to demand an explanation from the authorities.”

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**OPENS OCTOBER 5TH**



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Fri-Mon: 11:10, 1:20, 3:30, 5:40, 7:45, 10:15, Tue-Thu: 1:20, 3:30, 5:40, 7:45, 10:15

Q&A with Director Alex LeMay on Friday (10/5) and Saturday (10/6)

following the 7:45 show and Sunday (10/7) following the 3:30pm show.